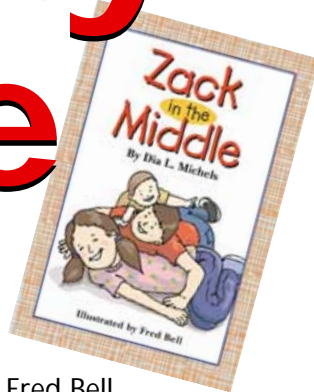


# Activity Guide



Written By Kathy Leggett

To Be Used With  
**Zack In The Middle**

Author Dia Michels, Illustrator Fred Bell

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Zack loves being the middle child... most of the time.

*Zack In The Middle* is a story about a middle child struggling to find his place in the world. Children with siblings – whether they are older, younger or in the middle — will instantly make connections with the main character Zack.

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# Critical Thinking/Pre-Reading

Look through the book with young readers to draw interest to the reading of the text. What do you think is happening? How can you tell?

Predict with children what they think the story will be about. What does the title tell us? Have children illustrate what they think will happen prior to reading. Save illustrations for reference and comparison after reading. Were we right?

When introducing the book to the children play a game with them—“**What word is missing?**” Cover the word *Middle* in the book title and have your audience predict what word would fit? What would make sense? Show the M and continue predictions. Then show the i and continue predictions “What word could this possibly be?”.

Continue until the entire word *Middle* is uncovered and they know the full title of the story. A sticky note works great for this activity.

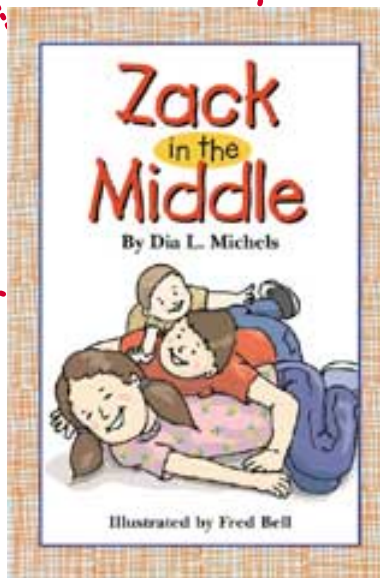
Read the dedication: “For Zaydek: In the middle.... Surrounded by love” What do you suppose this means? Who do you think Zaydek is? If you can’t see love, how could you be surrounded by love?

Interview the audience to determine the types of families they have. Who has brothers or sisters? Then use manipulatives, such as unifix or wooden cubes, to make a stacking graph that would depict family positions. Count together and discuss. How many members of the audience have older, younger or no siblings?

Discuss with listeners: What could you do when you were little? What can you do now? How have you changed? Are we expected to do more as we get older? Allow children to express how they talked when they were little (“blankie” or “me go”.) ...compared to how they talk now (“blanket” or “I will go”).

Predict from the title, **Zack In The Middle**, all the things that Zack could be in the middle of, like the middle of a swimming pool, the ocean, a park, a city, or even the middle of the road.

Build self-confidence with early readers by pointing out that the illustrations will often give us clues as to what the text will say.



## Shared Reading/During Reading

During the first reading, enjoy the story with the children by engaging them in predictions and a picture walk.

Considering that rereading enhances comprehension and fluency, encourage the children to read the story for a second time.

The simple text is perfect for choral or echo reading. (You read first and the listener “echoes” after you.)

## Questions For Discussion

How old is Zack (Kate, Mira)? Is Zack (Kate, Mira) older or younger than you are?

Who is the oldest? Who is the youngest?

What kinds of things can Zack do to help his family? How do you help?

Does being older have responsibilities?

Is it fair when Zack has to pick up all the toys?

Is it fair that Zack has to walk when Mira gets carried?

How does Zack feel when his sister goes away to sleepover camp? Have you ever felt the same way? When?

How is Zack feeling when he has to wash his own hair? Why?

How does Zack feel when his sister Kate does a somersault for him?



## Follow-Up/After Reading Activities

### Cooperative Learning/Story Elements:

All stories have a title, an author and illustrator, as well as characters and a setting. Along with a beginning, middle and an end, some stories, like *Zack In The Middle*, have a problem and a solution. Using a 6' X 3' bulletin board paper create a mural illustrating the parts found in the story. Use watercolors or magic markers for best results. Encourage discussion among the group as to how each part could be illustrated.

# Art/ Writing

## Compare and Contrast:

Have the children illustrate a picture showing their family and Zack's family and ask them to compare and contrast.

How is your family the same or different from Zack's family? Do you have any siblings? Who is older than you? Who is younger? Are you in the middle? How many kids are in the middle?

## Listening Center:

Tape yourself reading the story and place the book and tape in a place where individual children can enjoy rereading at any time. Be sure to include instructions and questions such as "Find Mira in the picture." What is she doing? Read the words to find out what is happening.

## Letter Writing:

Being in the middle is a challenge for Zack, He is growing up and learning to do more each day. As a result, his family is beginning to expect more from him. Write an informal letter to Zack offering him advice on how to handle being in the middle. For example, the children can tell Zack the ways he can help his sister Mira.

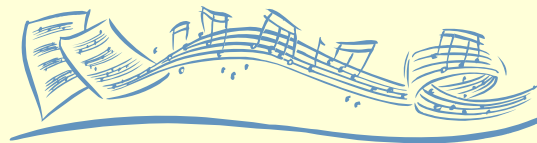
## Additional Letter Writing Ideas - Try one of these:

Pretend you are Kate at a sleepover camp. Write a letter to Zack telling him about what you are doing at camp.

Pretend you are Zack. Write a letter to Kate at camp.

Do you miss her? Are you enjoying being the oldest kid in the house for a while?

Zack's Family	My Family
Zack's family has a Mom and a Dad, 2 sisters and 1 brother. Zack is in the middle. He...	My family is...



## Music/Self Concept:

Sing a song about things Zack can do and things that we can do.

*(Sing to the tune of Mary Had A Little Lamb)*

Zack can read a book, read a book,  
Read a book,  
Zack can read a book  
To his sister Mira  
Zack can help his sister  
Help his sister, help his sister  
Zack can help his sister  
Help his sister Kate  
Zack can pick up his toys, ride his bike,  
get the napkins. Etc.

**Invite children to make up their own rhymes.**

I can tie my shoes, tie my shoes,  
I can tie my shoes, tie my shoes myself.

# Skill Development/Language Skills

The text of the story lends itself to the enhancement of various skills. When taught and practiced within the context of a story, the skill lesson becomes more meaningful to the learner not just an isolated concept.

## Word endings:

<b>er</b>	older	younger	bigger
<b>est</b>	oldest	youngest	biggest
	old	young	big

How do the endings change the meaning of the words?

Paint words and endings in different colors.

## Word Families:

**Zack** is part of a family. Words can have a family too. Use the rhyme “ack” to build new words.

Examples:

Zack hack lack snack shack pack

lack tack Jack quack rack sack

List words on paper.

Show **how knowing one word can be the key to reading and spelling many words.**

**Use magnetic letters** to form new words then think of sentence in which the new word would fit. Illustrate each word in a house shape. Each word in the family might live in a different room in the house.

## Who Scrambled Our Sentences?

Scramble simple sentences taken from the text. Ask the children to put the sentences back in order. This can be done orally or by writing the sentences down and cutting them apart. Different groups can be given a different sentence to put back together. Take turns finding the middle of the sentence.

i.e: old years Zack five is

## Sentence Structure:

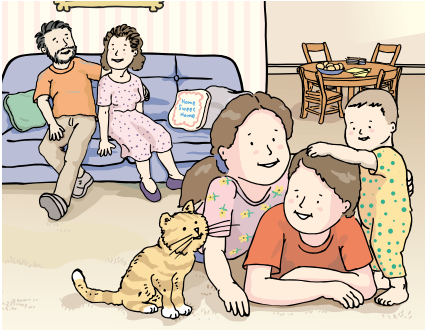
A sentence has a capital letter and a period.

Did we read sentences when we read this story?

Listen. How many sentences do you hear? How can you tell? Stomp your foot (or clap your hand) when you hear the end of a sentence.

# Social Studies

## Families:



Each family is special in its own way. What made Zack's family special?

What makes your family special?

Zack's family is made up of five people.

How many people are in your family? Where do you fit?

Do you have brothers or sisters or are

you an only child? Do all your brothers and sisters live with you? Who else is part of your family (grandparents, pets, etc.)?

Cut and paste pictures of families found in magazines to make a mural.

Compare the families in your pictures to Zack's family and to your family.

Are all families the same? Why or why not?

### Ask and Learn:

Ask your Mom, Dad, and neighbors to find out where they fit in their families. Do they feel differently about their place in their families now compared to when they were younger?

## Extensions To Go Beyond...Stretch Your Brain!

Zack found out at the end of the story that the middle was a great place to be and that it was just right for him.

Read this poem with the children.

In the middle is a great place to be.  
In the middle is just right for me.  
In the middle is so much fun.  
Other things have a special middle.  
Can you think of one?



Brainstorm with the children all the things where the middle could be special. Some examples include: your tongue is in the middle of your mouth and your nose is in the middle of your face. Socks are between your feet and your shoes and hands are in the middle of the clock. The axle is in the middle of wheel and M is in the middle of the alphabet.

Encourage the children to think of foods with middles. Possibilities might be an ice cream bar, an oreo cookie, chocolates, tacos, or maybe even a sandwich. Allow time for illustrations and sharing of favorite middles. (You might want to offer the children a treat with a middle to encourage good thinking.)

## THINK!

Zack felt sandwiched in the middle of his family.

What is your favorite sandwich? Ask 10 people about their favorite sandwiches.

Create a bar graph to illustrate the results.

Write, illustrate or discuss:

Ask the children to write, illustrate or discuss the sandwich they would most want to be.

## Role Playing

Zack's feelings change at various points in the story. Our feelings change too. What might make us feel sad can also make us feel happy.

Have you ever felt the way Zack felt? When? Is it possible to feel two different emotions at the same time?

## Movement Activities— Games

### **MONKEY IN THE MIDDLE**

All children stand in a circle. One person is chosen to be the monkey and stands in the center of the circle. Toss or kick a ball across the circle in an attempt to keep the ball away from the monkey. Once the monkey gets the ball, he or she chooses another child to be the monkey.



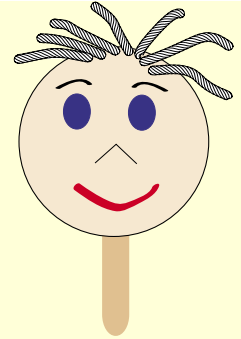
Have the children use puppets to role-play how Zack was feeling at different times in the story.

Simple stick puppets are an effective way to give the children the opportunity to role-play times when they have felt jealous or scared. *Supplies Needed:*

- Circles cut from white paper
- Tongue Depressors
- Scraps of yarn and colored paper

The puppets should show emotions like happy, sad, mad, scared, excited, surprised and jealous.

As you read the story discuss characters' personalities and how each might be feeling at various points in the story. Use puppets to encourage children to talk about times when they felt the same way. Offer children the opportunity to use the puppets in small groups and role-play an awkward situation.



# Number Concept/Math

## Ordinal Numbers:

Line up children to locate the one in the middle. Use this opportunity to discuss which child is first, second, third, or last in the line. Have the children face the opposite direction. Ask the children if their position in the line changed when they turned around.

## Number Sequence:

Call out numbers to the children, depending on their age and concept level, and have them respond with the number that fits in between: 1 and 3...5 and 7, etc.

## Odd and Even:

Investigate odd and even numbers. Share with the children a series of numbers and have them locate the number in the middle. Does that number have to be odd? Can more than one number be in the middle? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## Problem Solving:

I'm older than my sister Mira.

When she was 1. I was 5.

When she is 3. I will be \_\_\_\_\_.

When she is 10. I will be \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm younger than my sister Kate.

When she was 10. I was 5.

When she is 15. I will be \_\_\_\_\_.

When she is 18. I will be \_\_\_\_\_.

Continue with same types of questions using ages and names of students in the classroom. For example, How much younger is Zack than Kate, than Mira, than you?

## Graphing:

Make a class graph to show each child's position in his/her family.

Last Middle First Only

## Number Family:

Zack's family is made up of 5 people. How many math problems could we write about Zack's family? Build a number family using teddy bear counters (or any manipulative) to show how all the people in Zack's family could be together. What number family could you build to go with your own family? How is it the same or different from Zack's?

5

$1 + 4 = 5 \quad 4 + 1 = 5$

$2 + 3 = 5 \quad 5 + 0 = 5$

$3 + 2 = 5 \quad 0 + 5 = 5$

One could also include related subtraction facts depending on the concept level of the children.

$5 - 3 = 2$

1

2

3

4

5

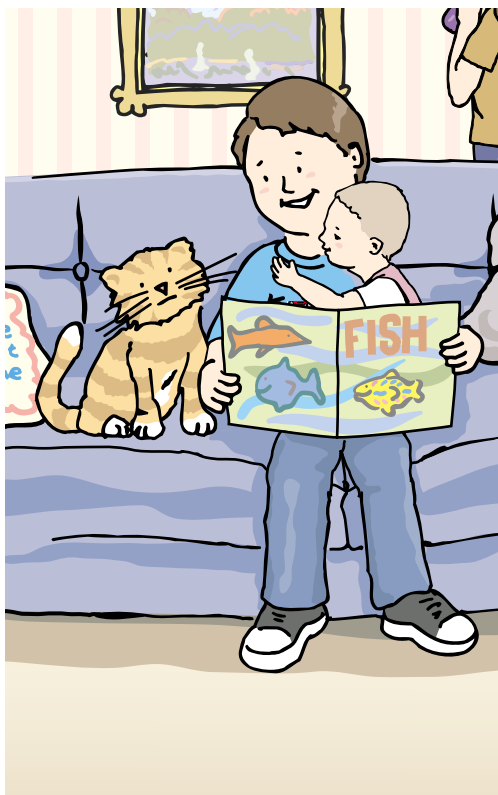
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## About the Story

My children have always been surrounded by books, but reading did not come easily for them. In fact, reading was a chore for them for many years. I used to try to think of creative ways to spark their reading efforts. One day while I was working with my middle child, Zaydek, it occurred to me that reading might be more interesting if the book were about him. That was the day we began *Zack in the Middle* (then called *Zaydek in the Middle*). I learned from this exercise that reading was hard — no matter who or what the subject was. Even though the book didn't make reading easier for him, it did help him understand his special place in the family. We all liked the book so much that we decided to publish it and share it with others. The name was changed because Zaydek is a difficult name for early readers, but it is very much his story.

*Dia Michels*



## About the Author/ Dia Michels

Dia lives with her family in Washington, DC. Their house was built when Theodore Roosevelt was President, almost a century ago. It's right near the U.S. Capitol in a part of Washington called Capitol Hill; you can see pictures of her neighborhood in *Look What I See! Where Can I Be? In the Neighborhood*.



Dia has been married to Tony Gualtieri for 16 years. He is a scientist at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, but his real love is playing with model trains. Dia and Tony have three children, Akaela (12), Zaydek (8), and Mira (2). Dia thinks that her family is just perfect, she says "to me, a family really becomes a family when there are more kids than grown-ups." Three other mammals — all domestic felines — share the house. Dia's hobbies include writing books, going for long walks, line dancing and singing songs from Broadway musicals.

Dia likes researching and writing, but most of all, she likes being a public speaker. She gives talks often at schools, libraries and big meetings or conferences. "I like to connect with people through the words in my books," she says, "but it is even better to connect with people face-to-face. The magic of words, whether written or spoken, is that they can bring us together. That's what learning how to write is all about and that's what life is all about."

You can write to Dia at:

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## Meet the Activity Guide Writer



Kathy Leggett has been creating exciting schooldays for little people for 23 years; 16 of them as a first grade teacher in the public schools of Prince William County, Virginia. She incorporates ideas that have worked in real classrooms into the Platypus Media Activity Guides. Kathy earned her teaching degree from Fairmont State University and her masters in gifted and talent education from West Virginia University. The mother of two boys, Kathy was also an active Cub Scout pack and den leader: her boys have now both graduated into Boy Scouts, much to her delight!

## Meet the Illustrator



Fred Bell draws on memories of childhood with his two sisters for illustrations in *Zack in the Middle*. He does his drawings in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he lives with his dog and cat. His drawings appear in publications throughout the US.



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