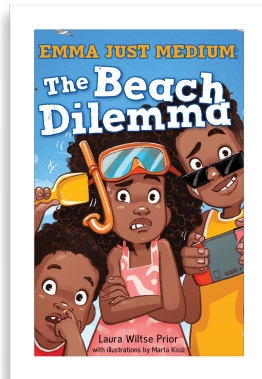




INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



The Beach Dilemma (Emma Just Medium)

By Laura Wiltse Prior

Genre: Middle Grade Fiction

Reviewed by Jaylynn Korrell

A sweetly relatable family vacation story where the middle child strives to make a name for herself

Emma, the second of three siblings, is tired of being in the middle all the time. Squished between her two brothers on a long ride to the beach, she brainstorms how she can stop being second pick and how she can gain more attention from her parents.

She hits the ground running when they arrive at the beach. She thinks maybe a few wild tactics could help her achieve her greatest goals. Unfortunately, what happens is just a riot of trials and missteps—until it becomes understanding. This is a story that will inspire any kid struggling with similar feelings.

As a mother to young children, I'm always on the lookout for ways to address problems without preaching. And while I don't have a middle child, I am a middle child myself. And how relatable it is! It's terrifically easy to sympathize with Emma. She is struggling to be seen in a family that has a lot going on. While sometimes coming off as a bit whiny, her portrayal painfully accurate. I appreciate the sincerity of her very real and very big feelings.

It's fun reading about how Emma Bemma's brain works. In her world, these issues are of extreme importance. There's so much passion in her. From acting like a big kid to acting like a baby—including eating her own booger to commit to the part—Emma doesn't give up even when she fails.

No one becomes a true enemy in the process either. The parents are forgiving of Emma when she makes mistakes and nowhere near negligent of her even if she's feeling ignored. Her older brother, Big, might pick on her sometimes, but it stays childish play and never feels cruel. She showcases the realness of the situations

without undermining Emma's feelings. Kids reading this will appreciate that validation, all in their own way.

There might be too many mentions of being a middle child though. While I understand that it's very much the point, this concept is repeated so often that it becomes monotonous and feels like it's hammering home a point that's already well-made. This eases up significantly after about the halfway mark, and everything is smooth sailing from there.

There are many dilemmas in this book, but a clear-cut favorite involves her good friend Wes. Throughout this whole process, she's also learning how to be a good friend. The book gives her many opportunities to both test and improve that friendship, and it is heartwarming to see the direction that story goes in. While so much of the book is centered on self, Wiltse Prior also gives this middle child an opportunity to be selfless. *The Beach Dilemma* is a story about acceptance, compassion, and love wrapped in a package that kids can understand and enjoy.

I certainly enjoyed Emma Bemma's dilemma. I have so much love for this little family and felt so proud for the way she navigates all the conundrums she finds herself in. This would be a sweet gift for those kids feeling unnoticed in their family or for the ones who could better understand their siblings.