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Perry the Penguin needs 9 clams to buy an ice scooter -- but he's not very good at saving. As Perry earns, spends, finds, loses, and borrows clams, a simple line graph demonstrates the concept of negative numbers.

Less Than Zero Details

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From Reader Review Less Than Zero for online ebook

Leanne Feathers says

I really liked the story that went along with the lesson. The illustrations were interesting and kept me intrigued to finish the book. I really liked the graphs that showed his progress and his loss, it helped to visualize the problems better.

Mallory says

This children's book is about a penguin named Perry who must save up enough clams (money) to buy a new scooter. Throughout the story Perry learns more about money management by keeping track of his spending and savings. This story would be a wonderful addition to any primary classroom setting and a great introduction to adding and subtraction. This book is also great for kids, parents, and teachers because it has additional activities students can do while they follow along in the book or do separately. Such as creating a number line while following along, or keeping track of allowance.

Kathryn Liu says

I learned that buying fun stuff can be a wast of money.

Tasasha Battle says

This story is about a penguin named Perry. Everyone at school has the new ice shooter but Perry. The new scooter costs nine clams and Perry has zero. So he does chores, work and search for enough clams to get the scooter. As he collects and loses clams Perry charts his progression. He creates a weekly dot chart to record his clams. The ultimate goal is to get enough clams for the scooter. On the other hand, just as easy as it is for Perry to get clams it is just as easy to lose them. Perry would spend and borrow money to either go to the circus or to eat fish pops after school. This book teaches students the purpose and importance of collecting data. They will learn how to create a dot plot and the purposes of the dot and connecting them. Also, when Perry has to borrow clams he goes in the negative and has to chart it. This teaches students the value of negative numbers and what they represent. When Perry charts it the students can visually see how the number line works and the numerical value of positive and negative numbers.

Amber says

This was better than Divide and Ride and did a good job demonstrating the concept of negative numbers although the kids still didn't think it was a fabulous book.

Doris Lucas says

This book is about Perry the Penguin. He needs nine clams to buy an ice scooter, but he's not very good at saving. Perry learned how to earn, spend, find, lose, and borrow clams on a simple line graph. I think this book would be fun to use in a class project where students get to try this on their own.

This book could be used for fourth graders to introduce how to use money or how to compare numbers less than zero. I think this book would be fun to scaffold into a class project where students get to try this on their own.

Dolly says

I thought this was an excellent book. It teaches the math concept of negative numbers, but at the same time teaches about earning money for the things that we want to buy, fiscal responsibility and the consequences of making bad choices. I love reading books like this to our girls. If they can learn these lessons now, they could possibly save themselves from a lifetime of crushing credit card debt and bad money management. I won't go so far as to say that this book does it all, but it is a very entertaining and informative story.

We've been reading lots of different books in the various MathStart series by Stuart J. Murphy. This book is in the MathStart Level 3 series and introduces the concept of negative numbers to children in a simple and easy-to-understand way.

The story is entertaining and the illustrations are colorful and fun. We recognize the style of Frank Remkiewicz from his collaborations with Jonathan London on the Froggy series. We really enjoyed reading this story together and we will certainly look for more of the MathStart books at our local library.

Jazzmyne says

Less than zero introduces negative and positive numbers as Perry the Penguin buys things. I would use this to talk about addition and subtraction, and negative and positive numbers.

Marina says

I really found this book as a discovery for myself. It is great for 3rd graders, which incorporates number sense (negative numbers). Students can have a clear understanding about negative numbers. The number line in front of students, while I would read this book can bring a clear explanation about negative numbers. The students can track Perry's(penguin) clams in the story by using a button or penny. The students would move the button/penny based on what is happening in the story. This story can be used even for assessing students' understanding.

Brittany N says

This book is great for an intro on negative numbers. It also demonstrates a life lesson about saving money.

Jesse Albers says

This book is about a penguin needs 9 clams to buy an ice scooter, but he's not good at saving his money. As Perry earns, spends, finds, loses, and borrows clams, students are introduced to the concept of negative numbers.

Math lesson

Lam Nguyen says

This book talks about how a simple line graph can demonstrate the concept of negative numbers in a kid freindly way.

Rose Gray says

Perry the penguin learns about negative numbers in this informational book. Perry realizes that all his friends have an ice scooter but him. His father says he needs 9 clams before he is able to purchase his scooter. After earning four clams from his mother for trimming ice, Fuzzy asks him if he wants to go to the Ice circus. Only he needs five clams so Fuzzy lets him borrow one. To keep track of his clams he graphs the number he has or loses everyday. However, Perry isn't having a very easy time learning the concept about how to save. He earns clams, he spends clams, he barrows clams, and he loses clams. After trial and error, Perry learns that burrowing clams is only hurting his goal and won't help him get his ice scooter any faster.

I didn't even realize till I started doing my good reads, that majority of the picture books I have borrowed feature animals as characters. I think the illustrations are always more interesting and the story lines are more imaginative. Your mom also had very good things to say about it, which made me want to read it more.

Style: The writing style is informative yet simple. The choice of words flow smoothly from page to page. The author included fluff words to make it more positive and kid friendly. For example on page 20, "Perry started a clam search. He looked everywhere - behind the rewarmerator, over the cooling oven, even the big ice chest." I also liked how the author used clams as a symbol for money throughout the book, or how the fishy treat truck was supposed to be comparable to our ice cream truck. Murphy incorporated symbols throughout the book making it relatable.

Theme: The author did a wonderful job incorporating a lesson within the text. In less than Zero the math concept is negative numbers. The slow introduction of negative numbers can help in the development of algebraic concepts. This is visible when Perry made the graph and 'counted up 4 lines and made another big dot on the 9 line. He connected the dot. I need 4 more clams to buy the scooter." He does this repeatedly through the book, showing reputation to the readers. The author did this to help the young readers comprehend the process of negative numbers

Color: The color palate used in the illustrations are very bright and happy. They create a mood of inviting and calmness. The sky in the background while they are playing on the ice is orange and red, the graph that Perry uses is yellow, resembling happiness. I also noticed the fishy treat truck was yellow and green which both mean cheerfulness. Which is very true, who isn't happy after receiving ice cream and in their case, sardines. I also think the author chose happy, upbeat colors was to bring the feeling that learning can be fun. The illustrations appear like they were half sketched, then used water colors to fill in the color portion. All thirty-one pages have illustrations that fully bleed to the outer edges. When Perry was laying down in bed reminiscing about his lost clams, you can sense the sadness by the dark grey/ black color the author used to surround him. I also think the author chose happy, upbeat colors was to bring the feeling that learning can be fun.

Representational: On the first two page spread within the book we see his friends zipping and sliding on the ice scooters. Fuzzy was doing figure eights, while Baldy could do flips. If you look at their facial expressions, pupils sit normal, while there beak is open showing excitement and joy. The background is a orange and red sky, possible sunset. On the right hand side, Perry is standing on a ice mound. His eyes are low, and his beak is closed showing disappointment or sadness due to the fact that he doesn't have an ice scooter. The text is aligned toward the top of the page but centered.

Less than Zero in my opinion is an informative nonfiction. Although the storyline with Perry is make believe, the concept about negative numbers is authentic. The criteria presented in the book was truthful, accurate and based on a primary source. Negative numbers become a big part of algebra as readers grow older, an early introduction could be beneficial. The storyline Murphy created, was absolutely perfect for teaching, and could be used as a discussion starter to help kids get engaged.

Chelsea Ulrich says

This book could be used with third or fourth graders to introduce how to use money, how you can have less than zero and also how you can use bar graphs to track data. I could see using this book and allowing students to try a project like this on their own as they investigate how you can save money and also how you can have negative or less than zero as you spend or use what you don't have. I think this book would be fun to use to scaffold into a class project where students get to try this on their own.

Julia B says

I loved this book. It's great for 3rd grade and incorporates number sense (negative numbers) and graphing. Students can have a number line in front of them while the teacher is reading. The students can track Perry's clams in the story by using a button or penny. The students would move the button/penny based on what is happening in the story, and the teacher would check for understanding
