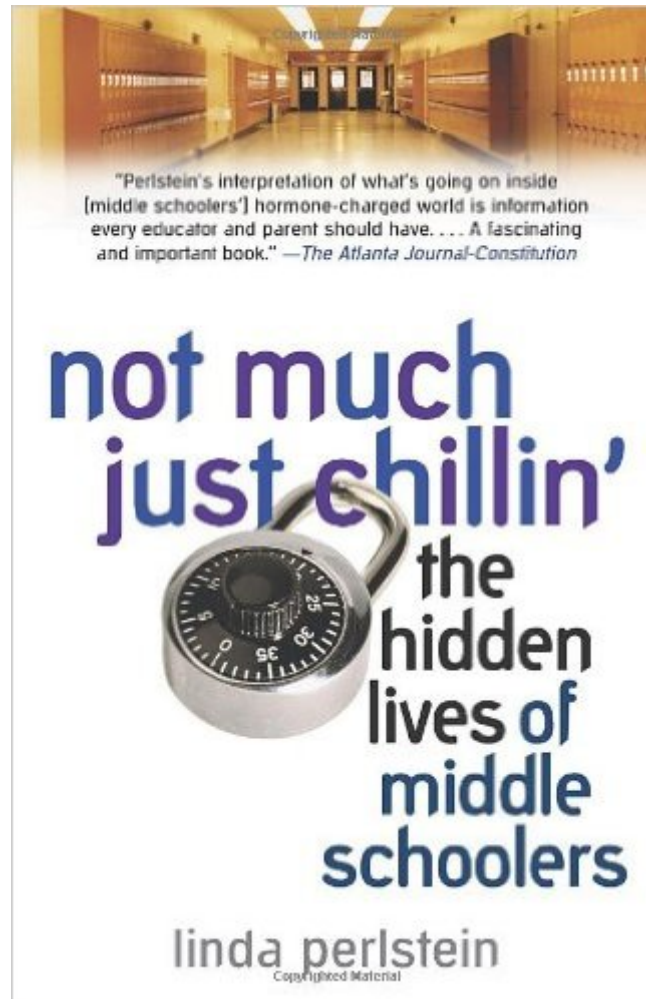


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# Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives Of Middle Schoolers



## Synopsis

Suddenly they go from striving for A's to barely passing, from fretting about cooties to obsessing for hours about crushes. Former chatterboxes answer in monosyllables; freethinkers mimic everything from clothes to opinions. Their bodies and psyches morph through the most radical changes since infancy. They are kids in the middle-school years, the age every adult remembers well enough to dread. Here at last is an up-to-date anthropology of this critically formative period. Prize-winning education reporter Linda Perlstein spent a year immersed in the lunchroom, classrooms, hearts, and minds of a group of suburban Maryland middle schoolers and emerged with this pathbreaking account. Perlstein reveals what's really going on under kids' don't-touch-me facade while they grapple with schoolwork, puberty, romance, and identity. A must-read for parents and educators, *Not Much Just Chillin'* offers a trail map to the baffling no-man's-land between child and teen.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Middle school kids often receive far too little attention by way of study and research. Perhaps some believe that middle school kids are not worth studying separately from adolescence since it is such a brief period of time. Yet, at the same time, there is probably no age group that goes through such a significant and dramatic set of developmental changes in a few short years than middle schoolers. I applaud Linda Perlstein's efforts to capture the essence of middle school kids and to represent the trials and tribulations of this age. In her study, Perlstein spent a year's time becoming a part of a real middle school. Rather than study these kids from an academic perspective, Perlstein

took a much more holistic and anthropological approach. She talked to the kids, she watched the kids, she spoke to their parents, and she observed their relational interactions and their highs and lows and she spent a lot of time with their teachers. The result of Linda Perlstein's efforts is a significant book for educators, parents and kids on the struggles of middle school years. While some might attack this as a study less scientific or quantitative than rigorous academics might prefer, I believe that she is right on the mark in reporting on these kids through her experience of them. This is a tough age and my belief is that it grows even more stressful on kids as our society continues to change and as kids mature faster on a physical level. I believe this is a book that should be read by a number of different groups and that it could be a foundation for some wonderful discussions among teachers and between teachers and parents. An understudied subject most interestingly presented. Highly Recommended. Daniel J. Maloney Saint Paul, Minnesota USA

I heartily applaud what the author set out to do, and (as the parent of a 6th grader) I couldn't wait to get my hands on her book. I have to say I was pretty disappointed overall. While the author chooses to focus on 5 middle schoolers, she devotes a disproportionate amount of time to the girls' relationships and problems; by the end of the book I felt I knew much less about the problems facing boys. Why, for instance, does she go into great detail about the bat mitzvah of Elizabeth, but only briefly refer to the wedding of Eric's dad -- an event with equally large impact in his life? Often she makes recommendations for parents or teachers to follow without citing any reference (other than, presumably, the comments of these admittedly self-centered tweeners). And her style of narrative can be confusing -- characters are brought into the story with little or no introduction, only to disappear and never return. Having said all that, I still am glad I read the book. I feel I gleaned a few insights (and of course am comforted to know I'm not the only parent wondering where my wonderful child went). However, if you are looking for a more thoroughly researched book with clear suggestions for middle school parents and teachers, I highly recommend "Our Last Best Shot" by Laura Sessions Stepp. She takes a similar approach but, for my money, gets right to the heart of the matter while Perlstein floats on the surface.

Would you like to turn back time and repeat your middle school/junior high school days? NO!? Most of us would not want to revisit that developmental period of growing pains, rioting hormones, instant crushes, and social angst. Linda Perlstein narrates the emotional rollercoaster rides of five "twens" over one academic year in a suburban middle school in MD. She insightfully captures their dialogue, their mood swings, and their daily dramas. Parents about to experience their first "tween" and

students in the field of education who are interested in teaching this age group will benefit from reading this book. I taught middle schoolers for nine of my 24 years in public school education and I remember clearly their emotional responses: "I didn't do anything!" "Why are you picking on me?" I was always surprised to learn, "I didn't like her yesterday, but today she's my best friend."

Chaperoning dances was a learning experience about sexual development. The sixth graders were still separated by sex with boys leaning nervously against one wall and girls huddled on the other wall; the seventh graders chased and hit each other; and, the eighth graders melted together. I found this book to be both enjoyable and enlightening. There were moments when I laughed out loud and moments when I empathized. Woven into the narrative about the students, Ms. Perlstein includes some pearls of wisdom from parents, educators, and medical professionals for working with "tweens." This is a time of tremendous change and many challenges for students. Hopefully, they will enjoy some of the moments on their rollercoaster rides between childhood and adulthood. And, adults involved with this age group are wise to remember, this too shall pass.

First of all, everyone that says this book isn't accurate is retarded. I go to WSMS and this book is so right it's like it was written by an eighth grader. She does a great job, perhaps you people don't have the insight to realise this book goes deeper. This book even helped me understand myself, I recommend it to girls and boys my age (eighth grade) who are looking to see through the eyes of another. It's hard being who we are, and this kinda makes it easier. :)

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