

Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers

Linda Perlstein



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A report from the front lines of the most formative-and least understood-years of children's lives

Suddenly they go from striving for A's to barely passing, or obsessing for hours over "boyfriends" they've barely spoken to. Former chatterboxes answer in monosyllables; free-thinkers mimic their peers' clothes, not to mention their opinions. Bodies and psyches morph under the most radical changes since infancy. On the surface, they're "just chillin'." Underneath, they're a stew of anxiety and ardor, conformity and rebellion. They are kids in the middle school years, the age every adult remembers well enough to dread. No one understands them, not parents, not teachers, least of all themselves-no one, that is, until Linda Perlstein spent a year immersed in the lives of suburban Maryland middle-schoolers and emerged with this pathbreaking account.

The book traverses the school year, following five representative kids-and including the stories of many more-as they study, party, IM each other, and simply explain what they think and feel. As Perlstein writes about what she saw and heard, she explains what's really going on under the don't-touch-me facade of these critically formative years, in which kids grapple with schoolwork, puberty, romance, identity, and new kinds of relationships with their parents and peers. *Not Much Just Chillin'* offers a trail map to the baffling no-man's-land between child and teen, the time when children don't want to grow up, and so badly do.

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