

*The Middle School Survival Guide*  
By Arlene Erlbach  
Walker Books for Young Readers, 2003

Fitting in. Academics. Changing Expectations. Serious Issues. These topics might find themselves at the forefront of most young adolescents' concern lists. Arlene Erlbach, covers each of these points in her new resource for middle school students, *The Middle School Survival Guide*. Exploring a wide range of relevant content, the guide serves as a road map for students navigating the challenges of change. Written especially for an audience ranging from ages 10 to 14, this survival guide reveals insight upon "the ins and outs of making the jump from the safe, familiar world of elementary school to the bigger and more sophisticated environment of middle school or junior high school."

With eye-catching graphics and student friendly text, *The Middle School Survival Guide*, offers its readers valuable advice on many facets of the middle-grades experience. From sibling rivalry, to locker combinations, to tough assignments, to bullies, to divorce, the book benefits its readers with a thorough scope. In fact, each of its chapters clearly outline suggestions for kids and quote the experts--other middle school students--on a subjects not found in a textbook. For instance, the guide explores the agonizing realities of young friendships. One student wrote, "I was friends with a guy all through elementary, and we did everything together. Then he found a new best friend. We're still best friends but not 'best' anymore. That's okay. I've found two other close buddies." Such perspectives fill the pages and motivate young adolescents to read on!

Because the book does approach many serious issues, some educators or parents might feel a bit uncomfortable steering students through the pages of the book. However, the frank discussions and the direct, honest responses answer questions that many kids might have and may not feel comfortable asking an adult. According to an experienced middle-grades educator Jody Baty from Emerson Middle School (Niles), "Kids are asking those questions and need to have clear, direct definitions and explanations, which were given."

Baty also recommended, "School libraries could benefit from having this book and counseling offices, too, as well as listing it on a reference list for middle level parents and kids." Additionally, educators themselves could benefit from the book because it reminds them of the challenges and struggles of their students. Its sound, straightforward advice can be easily shared, and the guide could be a trustworthy resource of the classroom. Because of its interesting yet humorous approach, *The Middle School Survival Guide*, could effectively guide advisory class discussions and engage students when it's read aloud. For middle school students, *The Middle School Survival Guide*, might be a reliable friend during tumultuous transition.