



## Emma Just Medium: The Beach Dilemma

**Laura Wiltse Prior**

**Marta Kissi, Illustrator**

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Emma, a middle sibling whose summer vacation takes a turn when she's in too much of a hurry to stand out, learns to relish her own age in Laura Wiltse Prior's breezy chapter book *Emma Just Medium*.

Emma has just finished the first grade. On a trip with her rambunctious brothers, whose antics wear her out, she endures classic kid problems: she's stuck with the middle seat. She doesn't like any of the food at the only roadside burger joint. And worse, one of her brothers gets car sick.

Emma's warm parents maintain calm with singing and yoga-inspired breathing. But Emma thinks that the solution to all of her problems is to no longer be a middle child. This creates tension because her friend Wes is also a middle child—and it means that she can't play with him.

Light humor directs the chapters as Emma's real desires to be respected and yet to also have fun war with each other and manifest in silly imitations of what she believes grown-ups are like: she greets people with air kisses, affects an accent, and borrows her mother's sarong, lipstick, and straw hat. Meanwhile, Wes is a good-natured sidekick who questions Emma's strange behavior and accepts her sudden new quirks and rebuffs. When Emma swerves in the opposite direction, though, and decides that it might work better to act "little," this causes trouble. Gentle advice from her father redirects her; this helps Emma to refocus her enthusiasm. Clear episodes capture her realistic feelings and infuse her childhood shortcomings and tender worries with wisdom.

In the family-driven chapter book *Emma Just Medium*, a girl learns that in-between can be a gift—and the right place to be.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2023)

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