

The Birth Order Book by Dr. Kevin Leman was a very useful and insightful book. Dr. Leman uses his book to explain why people are the way they are according to their birth order and other variables. There are many factors that go into determining a person's personality, achievements, and life in general. Leman proves that birth order plays an important role in all parts of a person's life. It is important to understand how birth order affects someone in-order-to better understand one's self and others. This information is especially crucial for teachers and parents in understanding how to teach and interact with growing children and adults alike.

Statistically birth order theories make sense; most CEO's and presidents are either first born or only children, many entrepreneurs are middle or later born children, and more often than not comedians and salespeople tend to be the babies of the family. These have to be more than coincidence and birth order makes sense of it. With this information it is important to keep in mind that not all people fit exactly into these perfect molds, there are always variables and conditions which switch roles or tweak them a just a little. Other influences on birth order include, sex, spacing, physical makeup and twins (p.33-34). All of these factors combine to explain why everyone is different; no one is just like another person because there are always different variables that they are exposed to.

In The Birth Order Book Leman describes each role in the birth order, giving an explanation for their corresponding characteristics. Often he adds sections for coping with certain types of personalities whether it is the reader learning how to work with their own traits or understanding how to interact with other people. He spends a lot of time talking to parents, encouraging and teaching them how to best interact with their specific type of child. Each chapter and idea has relevance and holds an abundance of information for everyone.

The first borns and only children are usually the leaders and achievers of society because they are driven towards success and stardom in their given fields. Some characteristics of first borns and onlies include; conscientious, well organized, serious, goal oriented, achieving, people pleasers, believers in authority, perfectionists, reliable, list makers, critical, scholarly, self-sacrificing, and conservative (p. 78). They are found to be successful in the work place as accountants, bookkeepers, executive secretaries, engineers, pastors, CEO's, presidents, astronauts, and computer specialists. Many of these characteristics occur due to the fact that first borns and onlies are just that, they are the first child of the family. Everything that the first baby does is a big deal; they get more attention than later children, and spend more one-on-one time with adults and family. This provides adult role models for the children so they take on more adult like characteristics. The other side to this is that once other children come along they are expected to take on extra responsibilities and serve as the guinea pigs for guidelines and rules; they also have a hard time transitioning to share their parent's attention (p. 87-91). Although there may be many apparent advantages connected to being a first born or only child the position comes with many responsibilities and pressures as well. (p.75-96)

It is often mentioned that the middle child or second born children get lost in the mix or ignored in the family setting. The middle children especially make it known that they were neglected or didn't get enough attention. This idea is mentioned along with Leman's description of middle children, yet they still make up the smallest section of the book. Leman even draws attention to this point but defends himself by stating that most psychologists just don't know what to do with middle borns. They tend to be the most mysterious and the least understood. This is mostly due to the fact that their characteristics rely heavily on the personalities of their siblings; this is called the "branching off effect". This means that the middle borns look up above and

sizes up the older siblings in-order-to determine their own path (p. 51-52). Often times the middle born decides that the older sibling is very successful in their own fields of expertise thus they branch off in another direction to be proficient in their own distinct activities. Depending on how middle children react within their family they can become very different people. Some descriptions of middle born children include; mediators have fewest pictures in the family photo album, avoid conflict, independent, extreme loyalty to peer groups, and they often have many friends (p. 15). Middle children can be loners, quiet, and shy, or sociable, friendly, and outgoing (p. 53). Often times they are described as peacemakers and mediators if they fall between feuding siblings or they can choose to rebel against the unfair cards they feel they are dealt. Successful middle borns use their mediating abilities to negotiate and become skilled entrepreneurs or work with foreign affairs and diplomacy. Even though middle borns feel they are at a disadvantage, these skills used in family feuds in childhood may make them the best-adjusted adults in the end. (p. 149-166)

Enter in the limelight loving last borns. These babies of the family are often charming, people oriented, tenacious, affectionate, engaging, uncomplicated, attention seekers, and tend to blame others (p.188). These are usually the trouble making clowns in class, who later turn into famous comedians and actors, as-well-as successful salespeople. Last borns often feel overshadowed by their older successful siblings so they play the clown to receive their deserved attention (p. 172). They are also not taken seriously in the family due to their baby status, thus they grow up always wanting to show the world that they can be just as successful as their older siblings (p. 170). Parents and family often act with impatience when it takes longer for the last born to learn. By the time they come the standards are already set leaving last borns to constantly try to live up to higher expectations. They also tend to be put down by older siblings

and children when they aren't developmentally up to their level. All of these characteristics combine to make an attention seeking last born, who knows how to work with people to get their way, while being continually determined to make their mark on the world in the process. (p. 167-189)

All of these birth orders and corresponding characteristics merely provide a hint of what to expect from people. Family size, socio economic status, spacing, personality and sex of siblings and personalities of parents, along with many other variables help to determine the finished product. Even though there are variables, it is still amazing how closely people fall into their own birth order description. Dr. Leman mentions many occasions where he is able to pick first borns out of a crowd just by watching them for a few minutes. There are examples of interviews where with just a few questions Dr. Leman can determine a person's birth order and possibly the type of family they came from. All of these help to solidify the reliability of the birth order theory.

I feel that everyone would benefit from reading this book whether it be for their own individual purposes, teaching, parenting, social, or other occupational purposes. I plan on purchasing my own copy and continually recommend it to my friends. Dr. Leman specifically addresses each birth order type at the end of their own section and provides helpful hints on how to overcome some weaknesses accustomed to that specific birth order, along with providing ways to use strengths. He supplies a section on using birth order in the work place as-well-as using that knowledge to make marriages work. The most prominent theme throughout the book involves understanding birth order as parents to accommodate and raise each child in the best environment possible.

I feel that this book helped me to understand myself and those around me on a new and different level. While reading the section on first borns I began to notice certain traits and characteristics of myself. In doing this I realized some more of my strengths and weaknesses. As a first born I have often seen myself as an overachieving, people-pleaser. These characteristics can be seen as a blessing or a curse. These traits provide potential for success at school and in the work place, but I also need to check myself and make sure that I do not put too much pressure on myself or others, by expecting everything to be perfect. These are unrealistic goals that can create stress in relationships and my own personal life. This book helped me to take a step back, look at my life, and pick out places where I can use my abilities for success rather than stress.

As a teacher and parent it is very important to understand the influence that birth order can have on a child. As educators and parents we need to make sure that we do not favor the task oriented first borns over the attention seeking last borns, while making middle borns feel important at the same time. We have to be careful not to compare siblings to each other and expect each child to behave in the same way. Although my younger brother and I share the same genes and grew up in the same household, we exhibit very different personalities. Many siblings are the same way. If parents and teachers expect older and younger siblings to behave in the same way they will only put an excess amount of pressure on the children and create more disappointment rather than an appreciation for differences.

The birth order provides some explanation to understanding why students react so differently in similar situations. Once we understand that some students are prone for high achievement and others are not comparatively lazy, then we can teach in a less biased fashion. Some students need more attention or coaxing in social situations due to the type of attention

they receive at home. It is important to try and accommodate as many of these needs in the classroom and at home as possible. The first step to accommodating is realizing the need is there and understanding where that need came from.

Another reason for parents and teachers to understand their own place in birth order is so that they can study how they react to certain children and students. Dr. Leman explained the simple phenomena where parents and teachers tend to sympathize or over identify with students from their own birth order. Last borns will side with the younger children making excuses like they are “too young” or just “don’t understand yet” (p. 277). First borns will appreciate the achieving drive characteristic of other first borns and only children while criticizing other children who don’t hold the same values. This can also work in the opposite direction where adults will be overly critical of children from the same birth order because they understand how they tick (p. 277). While it is important to understand why children act the way they do it is also important for adults to look at how their own birth order impacts their interactions with children as well.

I really enjoyed reading The Birth Order Book and would enthusiastically recommend it to teachers, parents, and anyone else who works with people. Dr. Kevin Leman provides an abundance of pertinent information in his book. He makes sure that the audience understands what birth order is and why it is important, and then proceeds to give information on how to use the knowledge about birth order in everyday life. Birth order is not merely a simple system of stereotyping people into categories but it is a way to understand and notice certain tendencies and characteristics common of people from each group. I feel that it is important for people to understand some reasons for why they are the way they are. The better you understand yourself the more you can utilize your strengths and accommodate your weaknesses. This helps not only

with your own personal life but in dealing with others as well. Most importantly as teachers and parents we need to understand why our students and children act the way they do. In order to accommodate and create the best environment for our children we must first learn to understand them and recognize their needs.

#### Reference

Leman, K. (1998). *The birth order book: why you are the way you are*. Michigan: Revell.

