

## Modern Family

Student 2: High Merit

NZQA Intended for teacher use only

1 James wedged himself into the middle seat of the car, once again. He wondered why he never had the privilege of taking the window seat. Why was it always his older brother Thomas? And how come his younger sister assumed the other window seat was reserved for her? He was sick of having to wear his brothers outgrown clothing, he too would like something he could call his own. Just because Thomas was the eldest he thought he was in charge. Whereas Lucy, the youngest, always managed to get her own way. His parents seemed blissfully unaware of the subtle disparities. Is this nurture or nature?

2 Of all the things that shape who we are, few seem less significant than the sequence in which we and our siblings arrive on this earth. Could it be your genes that set you up for an Olympic medal? Was it simply an accident that you are being nominated for a Nobel Prize instead of sweeping the streets of the town you were born in? The simple role of birth order could be more influential than you think.

3 The importance of birth order has been speculated for years. There is now increasing evidence to suggest that birth order may have a significant impact on an individual's outcome in life. According to Time magazine there is evidence to suggest that those born first may have an intellectual advantage over later born siblings. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as the combination of readily available resources and having the parents undivided attention right from the get go. [NAME], guidance counsellor at ISCHOOL) and the oldest sibling of her family, suggested that the financial position of the family can also influence the outcome of the children. When the first born arrives the family is often in a comfortable financial situation however as the size of the family increases there can be a depletion in resources, which is when younger siblings often inherit that dreaded hand me down sweater pulled from the depths of their older sibling's wardrobe.

3 Another factor that can set the eldest child up for success is the responsibility they take on from a young age. Eldest children often end up in a parental role as they help take care of their younger siblings. There are both positive and negative aspects to this situation. Independence can be developed from an early age and strong leadership skills often result from taking charge but there is also the added pressure to set the bar for their younger siblings and as the first born they have the task- of forging a path for younger members to follow. In a survey of corporate heads conducted by Vistage, an international organisation of CEOs, it was reported that 43 percent of those who occupy the CEO position in a company are first borns leaving 33 percent to be filled by middle children and the remaining 23 percent occupied by the youngest member of the family. Where do the other 77 percent of youngest children end up, you may ask?

3 Younger siblings, by contrast, are more often drawn to adventure and exhilaration leading the lives of artists, comedians, entrepreneurs and firefighters. They are willing to take risks with their physical safety and take on sports like rugby and ice hockey while their older siblings are content with a game of tennis or golf where they are out of harms way and the .: only danger they face is a possible tennis ball to the face. For the eldest siblings they are generally happy with their family system that provides them with so many perks and they are not going to try to change this. On the other hand youngest siblings see things a little differently and try to shake up the existing order. The younger siblings, who are disadvantaged in size and mental maturity often resort to low power' strategies in an attempt to cement their place in the family and refocus some of their older sibling's attention down to them. The use of humour and wit are popular ways for the youngest to steal the limelight and if we look back on history some of our greatest satirists including the likes of Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift were in fact the youngest in their brood. While you may think these examples give no more credibility to the theory of birth order than a horoscope gives to thee outcome of your week, personality tests have

shown that while first borns show a general sense of conscientiousness and responsibility, later borns score higher on agreeableness and their ability to get along in the world.

Later borns are often very perceptive from a young age as they make up for their lack of power, by understanding how others think and work and using the ability to anticipate what is going on in someone else's mind to their advantage. The youngest has been known the reputation of not only the people pleaser but the provoker too with the younger siblings willing to stand up for their beliefs and live with any consequences that may occur in doing so.

If the big chair in boardrooms is dominated by eldest siblings and the youngest are occupied seeking thrills and adventure, where do the middle children end up? Well, if the eldest child is living the high life perched behind a mahogany desk, then chances are the middle child will be meditating in a desolate sanctum on top of the Himalayas. De-identification can play a role in determining the outcome of the middle child as siblings who hope to stand out often do so by observing the actions of the eldest and doing the complete opposite. For example if the first born is achieving highly in school then the second may choose to slack off in order to receive attention. Often this pattern can then be replicated between the middle and youngest siblings. According to a Chinese study conducted in the 1990s a kind of zigzag pattern occurs with the first child achieving highly becoming the 'good child', the second child scoring low and the third child mimicking the path of the eldest. In a family consisting of three children the middle child can often do themselves a disservice by trying to be unique and instead ending up lost, this pattern has been known to continue into adulthood.

- 3 Middle children often become stuck in the centre seat and are often short changed when it comes to family resources. Unlike both the first and last child who generally both spend time as an only child, the middle child is never alone meaning they never get one hundred percent of the parents' investment of time and money. The lack of attention and resources can cause a lower self-esteem in middle children and can make it more difficult for them to identify their place in society making them unpredictable and a bit of a puzzle, even for researchers.

We can look at the evidence produced on birth order and quickly make the assumption that each family will slot nicely into the criteria we have given them. Is it really fair to point the finger and say "Well he is the oldest so obviously he'll be the successful one and she seems lost so is clearly the middle child, oh and I'm positive she's the youngest because she's always off climbing trees and talking to her imaginary friends." Put quite simply we can't make these assumptions because no family is quite the same. Every relationship has its own set of dynamics and factors such as the size, income, education, religion and ethnicity have to be taken into account, before a family is diagnosed' to be a certain way.

"Human behaviour cannot be dwindled down to decimal points and margins of error. It is also fair to say that we as a race have been known to defy the odds time and time again." Hannah Baird Just because you are the youngest does not mean you're less likely to become CEO of Telecom or Fonterra. Families are tied together with strings of emotions and experiences, often the strings break or become tangled to the point where a new network of connections is created. Yet many families would agree entirely that the traits and characteristics mentioned here are almost a mirror reflection of their own family. Which leaves us asking the question, "Is there some credit to the birth order theory?" Ultimately the issue will be debated for many years to come and there are no right or wrong answers. While science may disagree with the birth order theory, the experiences of millions are saying otherwise.

Although James would have liked to have a turn by Window, being stuck in the centre wasn't all bad. For he had a clear view of what was coming and was also able to see things from both sides.

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