

# A Leader's Guide to the

# MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL™

## Series

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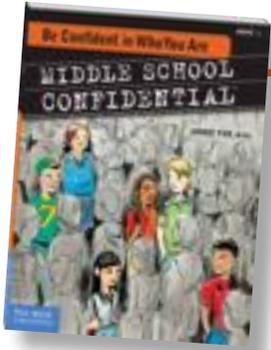
Annie Fox, M.Ed.

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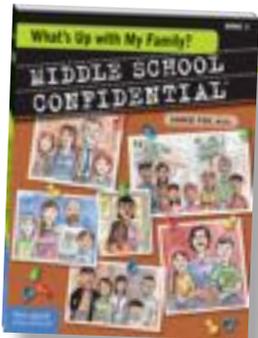
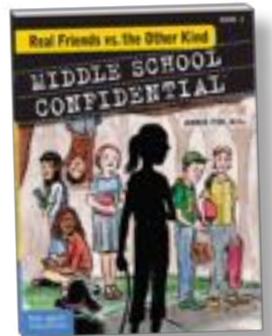
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217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200  
Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299  
(612) 338-2068  
[help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com)  
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# Introduction



PRESENTING A LEADER'S GUIDE TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL SERIES!

Featuring a blend of fiction and practical advice, books in the Middle School Confidential series provide tweens and teens with real-life answers in a fun and engaging graphic-novel format. The series is written directly to middle school students, so young people can enjoy reading the books on their own. But because I'm an educator with a focus on Emotional Intelligence (EI), I wrote them with specific life skills in mind. For this reason, teachers, counselors, and youth leaders can use the books to address important health and character education lessons in classrooms and after-school settings.

This leader's guide features discussion questions and activities that explore series topics in groups, even as students read books on their own. For example, you might discuss select chapters in advisory time based on topics your group is exploring in a social and emotional learning curriculum. In after-school settings, you may set up book-club-style meetings in which you discuss chapters in progression. Use the guide in whatever way best meets your needs and schedule requirements. Students might discuss topics in large or small groups; write about them in journals or as prompts for other formats, such as poetry or essays; or role-play situations to try out new approaches.

## **Activities in *A Leader's Guide to the Middle School Confidential Series* include:**

**Break It Down.** This activity gives readers the opportunity to "break down" what's happening in the character story lines from the books. Tweens and teens can in turn relate events from these episodes to experiences from their own lives.

**Take the Quiz!** Quizzes throughout the books in the Middle School Confidential series allow tweens and teens to explore important topics in unique ways. This guide gives directions for administering and discussing quizzes in groups.



FUN ACTIVITIES FOR DIVERSE SETTINGS!

**You Say What?** Find out what's on the minds of the students in your group with these questions designed to elicit feedback on middle school topics. Discussions incorporate character story lines, tips, tools, and tween and teen quotes.

**Let's Do This.** These activities allow you to address topics from the series in dynamic ways. From art projects to group activities and journaling prompts to classroom exercises, these activities are a lively way to reinforce important concepts.

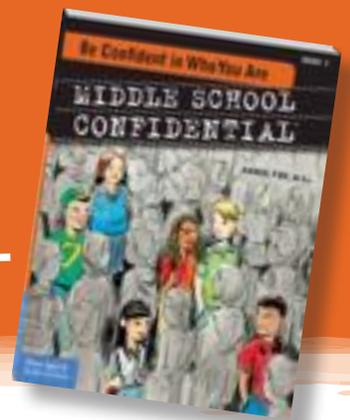
In preparing these activities, it was my goal to help adult leaders make learning fun. I hope the discussion questions and prompts promote lively conversations about the character story lines, quizzes, and other book features, and that the role plays and hands-on activities help young people bring the books' lessons into the real world.

In friendship,

**Annie Fox, M.Ed.**



# Book 1: Be Confident in Who You Are



The first book in the Middle School Confidential series brings readers into the lives of the Middle School Confidential characters as they try to meet new challenges without losing sight of who they are. Readers get practical advice for being healthy, feeling good about themselves, and staying in control of feelings and actions—even when the pressure is on.

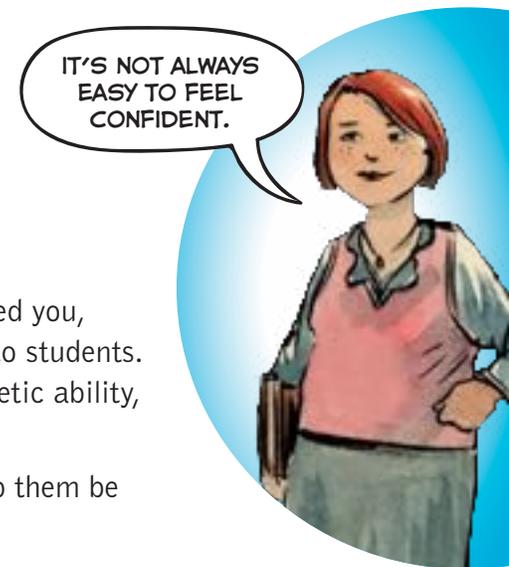
## Introduction (pages 2–7)

**Pages 2–7. Break It Down.** Mateo feels embarrassed and angry about being teased. At one time or another, we’ve all been teased—sometimes in a friendly way, other times by those who want to hurt us. Ask students to think of situations where being teased made them feel upset or uncomfortable. Ask: What did another person (or a group of people) do or say? How did you handle it?

**Page 5. You Say What?** In the illustration, Michelle asks: “If nobody teased you, would you totally accept yourself just the way you are?” Pose this question to students. Ask them to consider how they feel about looks, intelligence, popularity, athletic ability, or any other areas important to them.

For teens answering *yes*, ask: What advice would you give other teens to help them be more accepting of themselves?

For teens answering *no*, ask: What stands in the way of your being confident in who you are?



## Chapter 1: Do You Like the Way You Look? (pages 8–19)

Middle school is a time of change when many young people don’t necessarily like the way they look. Sometimes these feelings are related to legitimate body concerns. Other times they’re more about negative feelings tweens and teens might have about school, friends, or things going on at home. Regardless, body issues can have a strong effect on students, and it’s important these issues are addressed.

**Pages 8–9. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris introduces the idea of “body beefs” — complaints about how we look. Ask if any members of your group feel comfortable sharing their “body beefs.”

**Page 11. You Say What?** In “My Body Beef,” Abby introduces quotes from tweens and teens who have complaints about how they look. Read through the quotes as a group, commenting on the last quote (“My tongue is weird!”) as an example of how the body hang-ups we have can be very arbitrary and even silly. Ask: Where do people get the idea that there’s something wrong with them?

**Page 11. Let’s Do This.** Review concepts in “Ads Mess with Your Mind” for this activity. Bring in (or borrow from the library) magazines geared toward teens as well as mainstream publications for adults. (Sunday newspaper magazine and ad sections are good, too.) Divide students into small groups, and ask that they examine three or four ads for different products. Ask groups to discuss the following questions for each ad:

1. Who is this ad aimed at?
2. What’s the message here?
3. What do I think when I see the ad?
4. How does it make me feel about the product?
5. How does it make me feel about myself?
6. If I could change this ad so that it did a better job of promoting self-confidence, what would I change?

When they’re done discussing ads, students can present their observations and feelings to the full group.



**Page 14. You Say What?** “Dealing with Teasing” features tips tweens and teens can use to address being put down by others. Discuss how put-downs and insults can affect how we feel about ourselves (and how we feel about other people).

Ask students in your group: How much of a problem is teasing in our school this year? How does that compare to other years? What are your ideas for reducing the amount of teasing in our school?

**Page 15. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jack tries to help Abby stop her negative thinking. Ask your group of students: What does Jack mean by saying, “Think like a loser, you’ll feel like a loser.” As an extension of this discussion, ask students to draw pictures of themselves feeling at their most confident. Suggest they show what they are doing at these confident times or what they are telling themselves.

## Chapter 2: Sometimes I Worry What Other People Think (pages 20–31)

It’s normal for tweens and teens to care what other people think—we all want to be liked and respected. But it’s important young people understand that caring too much can be a problem, especially if it causes a lot of worry in their lives or holds them back from being who they really are.

**Pages 20–21. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jen tells her friends, “I just do what the popular people do. Then I know I’ll be liked.” Ask students to think about how they feel about this advice. Ask: Does this advice make sense? Why or why not?

**Page 23. You Say What?** “Why I Care What Other People Think” features quotes from tweens and teens preoccupied with others’ opinions. Ask students: Why do you care what other people think? For those who are not worried about outside opinions, ask: What advice would you give to tweens and teens who wish others’ views didn’t matter so much?

**Page 23. Let’s Do This.** “What I Like About Myself” features an activity to help students celebrate their positive qualities. Ask teens and tweens to make a list of the things they respect and admire about themselves. Get them thinking by giving them some questions they can ask themselves: What am I good at doing? What do I like about my personality? In what ways do I show that I’m a good and interesting person?

When students are done, ask for volunteers to share their lists. Encourage them to think about how they can do a better job of showing people who they really are—without bragging or putting others down.

**Page 26. You Say What?** “Here’s Where I Draw the Line . . .” features quotes from tweens and teens sharing where they won’t go. Ask students: Where do you draw the line? What happens when you and your friends have different ideas about where the line should be drawn?

**Page 27. Break It Down.** In the character story line, each of the students from Milldale realize what they might be capable of if they weren’t so worried about what other people think. Ask students in your group: If you didn’t worry about other people’s opinions, what would you give yourself permission to do? What’s really in the way of your having that kind of self-confidence right now?

**Page 30. Take the Quiz!** The “Do I Worry Too Much About What Other People Think?” quiz features true or false questions about whether tweens and teens might be too concerned about others’ opinions. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer T or F for questions on a piece of paper. Ask them to tally up their “True” answers before your discussion. Ask: What was your score? What surprised you about your score? If you had taken this quiz last year, what would have been different? If someone wanted to worry less about what others think, how might they do that?

## **Chapter 3: Sometimes I Just Lose It (pages 32–43)**

Unlike machines, human beings have emotions. It’s natural that we sometimes get angry or upset with others. It’s important for tweens and teens to know that it’s not possible—or expected of them—that they stay in control of feelings 24/7. This chapter can give young people comfort to learn that all of us “lose it” from time to time. It also offers ideas for dealing with strong emotions in constructive ways.

**Pages 32–33. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Abby doesn't realize she's annoying her friend because Michelle doesn't say anything until her blow up. Ask students in your group: Have you ever been in a situation like this where you felt annoyed by someone? How did you handle it? Has anyone ever said that you were being annoying? What did you do then?

**Page 35. You Say What?** The "6 Tips for Staying Cool" section features ideas for remaining calm when the pressure is on. Ask students: What do you think of these tips? Have you ever tried any of them? What other tips have you discovered that help you stay cool and more in control of your emotions?

**Page 38. You Say What?** "I'm Sorry . . ." features quotes from tweens and teens who realize they've made a mistake. Ask students: If you could apologize to anyone for something you did, what would you say? Encourage students not to use others' names in their answers—for example, "I'd tell my friend 'I'm really sorry I told everyone who you like after you told me not to.'"

**Pages 40–41. Take the Quiz!** The "Am I the Boss of My Anger?" quiz features multiple-choice questions about how well young people manage anger. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer a, b, c, or d to complete sentences on a piece of paper. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, only what's true for them. When finished, have students tally their scores and provide feedback using the scoring system on page 41. Ask: If you or a friend had a problem with anger or other strong emotions, who would you turn to for help? (Encourage them to talk with an adult they trust.)

## Chapter 4: Meet the Opinionator (pages 44–53)

Peer approval is important during the middle school years. For this reason, it's natural that tweens and teens are in the habit of comparing themselves to others to see if they measure up. This chapter is all about this little voice in the back of their minds—aka the "Opinionator"—that makes snap decisions about who's better looking, a better athlete, a better dresser, smarter, more popular, cooler, etc. Tips and tools in the section can help young people recognize that the Opinionator can (and often does) mess with their self-confidence and help put them in a better position to tune it out.

**Pages 44–45. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris is his own worst enemy—a whole lot of self-doubt is limiting what he thinks he can do. Ask students in your group: In what ways did Chris's Opinionator contribute to his wipe out? Can you think of a time when your Opinionator messed with your confidence and influenced your performance (in sports, social situations, class, or other areas)?

**Page 47. You Say What?** "Facts About Opinions" features ideas for figuring out whether something is absolutely true or just something someone thinks. Read through the questions for determining the difference. Ask for students to share what they believe is the difference between a fact and an opinion. Then, as a class, compile two lists—one of facts and the other of opinions. Put these ideas on the board as students brainstorm. For each, ask: Is everyone in agreement? If not, why not?

**Page 48. Take the Quiz!** The “Fact or Opinion?” quiz is meant to help figure out the difference between facts and opinions. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer F or O for questions on a piece of paper. Afterward, read the answers. Discuss gray areas where it might be difficult to know the difference. (For example, “She’s beautiful.” Is it a fact or an opinion? Can it be proven? If so, based on what factual evidence?) Ask: Can you think of a time when you mistakenly thought an opinion was a fact. Looking back, how would you handle that situation differently? From now on, what can you do to help yourself and your friends get better at knowing the difference between facts and opinions?

## **Chapter 5: Fact Finder—Getting at the Truth (pages 54–61)**

Different media bombard us everyday with messages about what we should buy, what we should do, how we should dress, and on and on. To help filter these messages, it’s essential tweens and teens understand how to think critically about them. This chapter helps readers understand the difference between facts and assumptions or opinions—including things they might be thinking about themselves. The tips and tools here can help tweens and teens increase their self-confidence.

**Page 54. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Michelle and Jen talk about how assumptions almost prevented them from becoming friends. Ask students in your group: What assumptions did Jen and Michelle have about each other in the past? What were those assumptions based on? Have you ever made assumptions about other people before you really got to know them? Were your assumptions ever off the mark?

**Page 56. You Say What?** “From the ‘I Assume . . .’ Files” features quotes from tweens and teens who have assumptions about themselves. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. When the reading is done, ask students: What are some assumptions you have (or have had) about yourself?

**Page 56. Let’s Do This.** The “Assumptions Toolkit” features an individual self-assessment, but you can administer it in a group setting. Read each of the activity’s steps aloud, asking students to respond in a notebook. Tell students this can be a helpful tool to work on negative assumptions they might have, either on their own or with the help of someone. (Make time for students who might wish to discuss assumptions privately with you.) Encourage anyone who does wish to share with the class to do so.

**Page 57. Break It Down.** In the character story line, the kids from Milldale talk about reasonable and unreasonable assumptions. Ask students in your group: What’s the difference between a reasonable assumption and an unreasonable one?

**Page 60. Take the Quiz!** The “Assumption or Fact?” quiz is all about figuring out the difference between a reasonable assumption and an unreasonable one. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer A or F for questions on a piece of paper. Afterward, read the answers. Discuss where these assumptions might come from. Ask: How might it help us to have assumptions? How might it get in the way?

## Chapter 6: I Don't Get It (pages 62–71)

Tweens and teens often have a difficult time admitting they're uncertain or confused. A fear of "looking bad" in front of others might cause them to fake it—rather than ask for the help they need. This chapter can help them see that it's normal to feel uncertain or confused at different times. In doing the activities in the section, emphasize the idea that confusion can be a useful signal that we may need more information to make our next best move.

**Page 62. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris, Mateo, and Jack are together, yet they're each feeling very different emotions. Ask students: What's going on with each of the guys? Can you think of a time you were with a friend and felt uncertain about something but didn't say anything?

**Page 63. You Say What?** "I Get Confused When . . ." features quotes from tweens and teens who admit to not having all the answers. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. When the reading is done, ask students: What (or who) confuses you?

**Pages 65–66. Take the Quiz!** The "How Confusing!" quiz features multiple-choice questions about figuring out what to do in tough situations. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer a, b, c, or d to complete sentences on a piece of paper. Have students tally their scores and provide feedback using the scoring system on page 66. Ask: What did this quiz tell you about yourself that you didn't already know. If you would like to be less confused and more "in the know," what are some ideas for getting there?

**Page 68. You Say What?** "I Don't Know What to Do!" features quotes from tweens and teens who feel uncertain about their next best move. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. When the reading is done, ask students to think about a time when they didn't know what to do. Ask: What happened? Knowing what you know now about ways to clear up confusion, what might you have done differently?

**Page 69. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jen goes to her aunt's house because she's feeling upset about a situation at home and doesn't know what to do. Ask students in your group: Have you ever given yourself some space to think about your feelings and figure out your next best move? What happened as a result of taking the time to chill?

## Chapter 7: I'm Stressed Out! (pages 72–82)

It can be reassuring for tweens and teens to realize stress is part of everyone's life. Talking about stress in a safe environment can be a great de-stressor—and the activities in this chapter allow you to do just that. Important in teaching stress relief to young people is practicing healthy stress management skills when you're with them. Help them understand that whenever they're stressed, the best thing to do is notice it, stop, and try to relax so they can think more clearly.

**Page 73. You Say What?** “What Stresses Me Out” features quotes from tweens and teens who feel under a lot of pressure. Ask students to read these quotes in dramatic voices. Have some fun making them sound more and more stressed. Ask: What stresses you out these days? What are some things that used to stress you out but that don’t bother you anymore? What caused the change in you?

**Page 75. You Say What?** Page 75 features “5 Everyday Ways to De-Stress.” Ask students in your group to brainstorm additional activities they use to relieve stress. You might record and post these ideas as a reminder of positive, healthy stress relievers.

**Page 78. Let’s Do This.** “Relax + Re-Center” features a breathing exercise that is a quick and efficient way to de-stress. Guide your students through these ten steps. (You might want to practice it ahead of time to get the hang of it yourself.) Start every class meeting with this breathing activity and you’re likely to have calmer, more focused students.

## Chapter 8: I Like Who I Am (pages 83–90)

Middle school students can be very hard on themselves. You can help them feel better about themselves by focusing on their strengths. This chapter features opportunities for tweens and teens to recognize what’s special about them. There are also important themes of acceptance of others and treating others with respect.

**Pages 83 and 86. Break It Down.** Throughout the book, Mateo is teased three different times by the same guy (pages 4, 72, 83). Mateo responds in different ways each time he is put down, first by getting angry and then by getting super stressed. The last time Mateo finds a winning strategy. Ask students in your group: What do you think changed that allowed Mateo to be so fearless on the stage?

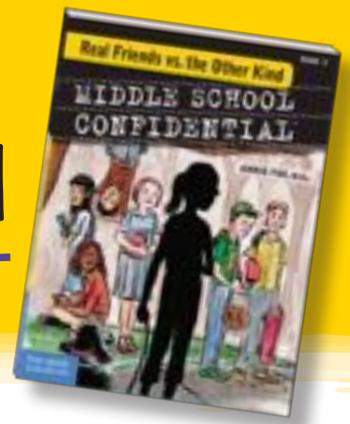
**Page 84. Let’s Do This.** “What’s Cool About You?” features an activity to help young people celebrate who they are. Ask teens and tweens to answer the questions in the activity: I’m cool because I am . . . I’m cool because I know . . . I’m cool because I can . . . Ask students to complete a creative project that represents their cool qualities. The project might be an art collage, a piece of photography, a story or poem, a song, or another final product of their choosing.

**Page 85. Let’s Do This.** “What I Like About Myself” features quotes from tweens and teens sharing words about their strengths. Ask young people in your group to write down talents or qualities they like or admire about each of the other students in your setting. Ask students to remove these positive statements from notebooks and pass them to one another as notes.



## Book 2:

# Real Friends vs. the Other Kind



The second Middle School Confidential title finds the characters navigating the ins and outs of friendship, cliques, crushes, and more. Readers will find expert information on making friends, resolving disputes, and dealing with other aspects of the social scene—including gossip, exclusion, cyberbullying, peer pressure, and being there for friends who need help.

## Introduction (pages 2–7)

**Page 4. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris’s old “friend” sure doesn’t act like one. Ask students: Can you think of a time when your feelings changed toward someone who used to be a close friend? What happened and how did you handle it? (Encourage students not to use real names when talking about other people.)

IT CAN BE TOUGH TO TELL  
REAL FRIENDS FROM THE  
OTHER KIND.

**Page 5. You Say What?** In the illustration, Michelle asks: “What exactly do we mean when we call someone a friend?” Pose this question to students to get their thoughts on friendship.



## Chapter 1: Real Friends (pages 8–16)

Helping students understand the difference between a real friend and “the other kind” provides them with practical means for evaluating friendships. This chapter also has suggestions for being a real friend to others.

**Page 10. Let’s Do This.** “Real Friend? Or the Other Kind?” features an activity to get tweens and teens thinking about friendship. On the board, write two headings: “Real Friends” and “The Other Kind.” Encourage students to think of traits, behaviors, and signs that someone is either a real friend or the other kind, recording their ideas. Let this activity lead to a full discussion of what it means to be a real friend (rather than the other kind). Ask: How many of you have experience with real friends? How about the other kind? How many of you have been a real friend to someone? Who has ever (even if only once) exhibited some of the “other kind” of friend behavior? (It may encourage honesty among students if

you share a situation from your own experience to show we have all been both kinds of friend at one time or another.

**Page 13. Let's Do This.** "Who Are Your Real Friends?" features an assessment for tweens and teens. Administer this activity to the group, asking students to privately inventory the quality of their relationships with various friends. Make sure young people know that this information is personal and should not be shared as it could be hurtful to others. Ask students in your group to think about this question: If you had done this activity a year ago, how might the outcome been different?

**Page 14. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Mateo trusts his friends (and they are in turn trustworthy). Ask students in your group: If you were blindfolded, who would you trust most to lead you? Do you think that person trusts you as much as you trust them? Why or why not?

**Page 16. You Say What?** The "Need to Know?" feature includes recommended reads for tweens and teens on friendship. Encourage students to share some of their favorite books with stories of friendship.

## Chapter 2: Friendship Dilemmas (pages 17–27)

Middle school students aren't too old to be reminded that even the best of friends sometimes do or say things that annoy or hurt each other—often without even knowing that they're doing it. Emphasize throughout the lessons in this section that effective communication is the best way to resolve friendship problems. When you communicate effectively with tweens and teens, you show by example the importance of telling the truth and listening with an open heart and mind.

**Page 17. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris, Mateo, and Jack are giving Michelle a hard time. Ask students: What do you think Michelle might have done to cause the guys to tease her?

**Page 19. You Say What?** "I Wasn't Such a Good Friend" features quotes from tweens and teens who didn't live up to their end of the friendship bargain. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. After each quote has been read, ask the person who read it to imagine how the person who was wronged felt. Extend the activity by asking students to role-play each situation. For example, in the first quote have one person play the role of Raymond and another the friend he teased.

**Page 20. You Say What?** "Don't Add to the Garbage" discusses the concept of social "garbage" as it applies to your school. Encourage students to talk about choices we each make every day that might add to or take away some of the "garbage."

**Page 23–24. Take the Quiz!** The "What Would a Real Friend Do?" quiz allows students to think about what they might do in different friendship dilemmas. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer a, b, c, or d to complete sentences on a piece of paper. Provide feedback using the

scoring system on page 24 while entertaining different points of view. Say: Since no two friends or two friendships are alike, is it possible to say one answer is absolutely correct? Why or why not?

**Page 25. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Mateo, Chris, and Jack apologize to Michelle. Ask: What do you think about the way the guys and Michelle cleared the air? Ever been in a situation like that? What happened?

**Page 26. You Say What?** “Apologies . . .” features tips tweens and teens can use to say they’re sorry. Encourage students to share an experience with a particularly difficult apology (or write about it). What made that one so challenging to offer or to accept?

### Chapter 3: Should I or Shouldn’t I? (pages 28–36)

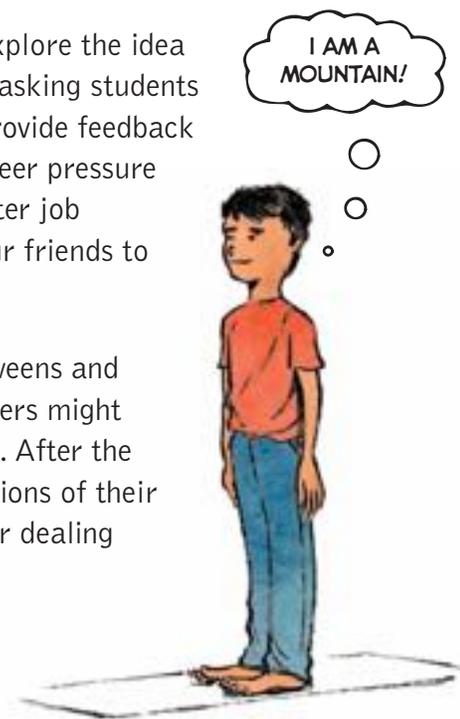
Peer pressure can be particularly strong in middle school. It’s important that educators, parents, and other adults help students stay strong in the face of pressure to go unthinkingly along with what others say or do. Activities in this chapter can help you show students that standing up for one’s values is always more important than the approval of others. Tweens and teens can remain true to themselves without damaging relationships with peers.

**Page 28. Break It Down.** In the character story line, the teen experts give Nori some advice on a friendship dilemma. Ask: What advice would you give to Nori? If you’ve ever been in a situation where you felt stuck in the middle, how did you handle it?

**Page 32. Take the Quiz!** The “Where Do You Stand?” quiz allows you to explore the idea of personal values with tweens and teens. Read each of the questions aloud, asking students to answer Y or N on a piece of paper. Have students tally their scores and provide feedback using the scoring system at the bottom of the page. Ask: Why do you think peer pressure can be a real challenge for middle school students? How might you do a better job sticking to your values? How might you do a better job of not pressuring your friends to do things that don’t feel right to them?

**Page 35. You Say What?** “Dealing with Pressure” features quotes from tweens and teens who have discovered ways to do what’s right for them—even when others might be pushing them in other directions. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. After the quotes have been read, ask young people in your group to contribute suggestions of their own. You might want to compile and post a list of their winning strategies for dealing with pressure.

**Page 35. Let’s Do This.** The “Mountain Pose” can help tweens and teens feel stronger in the face of pressure from others. If you’re not



familiar with this yoga pose, it's a good idea to practice on your own before teaching it. Guide students through the pose and ask how they feel standing strong like a mountain.

## Chapter 4: Worried About a Friend? (pages 37–43)

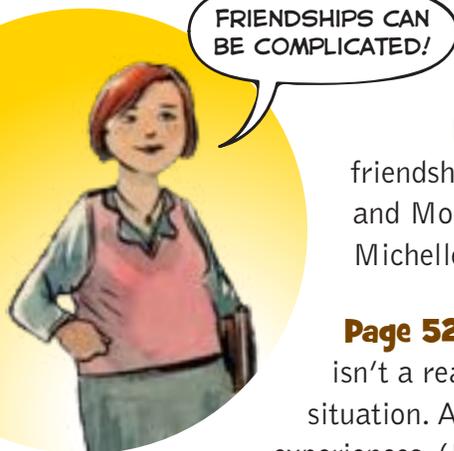
It isn't always easy to know what a real friend would do. Sometimes a friend may be engaging in unhealthy or risky behavior and may not want us to step in to help. It's important young people know that the only choice here is to act in a way to help someone in trouble—even if that means getting an adult involved and making a friend angry. Saving a life is more important than saving a friendship.

**Page 38. You Say What?** "What's a Friend Supposed to Do?" features quotes from tweens and teens unsure what they should do to help a friend. Using the quotes as a starting place, have pairs of students play the roles of the worried friend and the person who's causing the worry. Encourage students to be real in expressing their feelings on both sides of the dialogue.

**Page 40. You Say What?** "From the 'Helping a Friend' File" features quotes from tweens and teens who stepped in to help a friend. Ask students to talk or write about a time when they helped (or tried to help) a friend. Ask: How was your help received? (Encourage students not to use real names when talking about other people.)

## Chapter 5: So-Called Friends (pages 44–55)

Middle school students often struggle with unbalanced friendships in which one friend may be using the other. Girls especially are reluctant to speak up for themselves in these situations. You can help your students (now and in future relationships) by reinforcing this message:

A cartoon illustration of a young girl with short brown hair, wearing a pink vest over a light blue shirt and a grey skirt. She has her hands on her hips and a speech bubble above her head. The speech bubble contains the text "FRIENDSHIPS CAN BE COMPLICATED!".

FRIENDSHIPS CAN BE COMPLICATED!

Whenever it feels like something's wrong, real friends talk and try to work things out. Activities in this section can help them do that.

**Pages 44, 45, 48. Break It Down.** As the character story line shows, friendships can be complicated. Ask students in your group: What's going on with Abby and Monique? Where do Chris and Jack fit into the drama? And why is Abby angry at Michelle and Jen?

**Page 52. You Say What?** In the character story line, Abby realizes that Monique isn't a real friend, but the other kind. Ask students if they've ever been in a similar situation. Ask whether there is anyone in your group who feels comfortable sharing their experiences. (Encourage students not to use real names when talking about other people.)

Conclude by asking: Are girl friendships more complicated than boy friendships? Less? The same? Why do you think so?

**Page 54. You Say What?** “When It’s Not Working” features ideas for tweens and teens who are tired of being treated badly by a friend. Read over these suggestions as a group and encourage students to share their own ideas. Ask: What have you done to try to get a friendship back on track? How did it work out?

## Chapter 6: Let’s Go Out (pages 56–68)

Tween and teen friendships can be complicated. So can boyfriend/girlfriend situations. During this time of life, trying to balance time with friends and time with a boyfriend or girlfriend can be especially challenging and stressful. Help students gain perspective on a major friendship dilemma with this section.

**Pages 56, 60, and 63. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris has been crushing on Monique from the beginning (see page 8). She doesn’t like him, but he couldn’t have known that. Ask students: Knowing only that Chris liked Monique, what do you think of his decision to tell Jack and Mateo? How about his decision to get Abby to talk to Monique? Have you ever been in a situation where you found out that your crush didn’t like you? How did you cope with the rejection?

**Pages 58–59. Let’s Do This.** “Does My Crush Like Me?” and “What Do the Signs Say?” feature insight into figuring out whether another person might like you. Read these features together and ask students what they think of the advice. Suggest they brainstorm suggestions of their own. Ask: How can you tell if your crush (or anybody) likes you in that way?

**Page 66. Take the Quiz!** The “What Would a Friend Do?” quiz features multiple-choice questions about tensions that can arise with friends when significant others enter the mix. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer a, b, c, or d. Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers, only what’s true for them. After the quiz, go over the answers on page 67, encouraging young people to share what they have written. Ask: Do you agree or disagree with the quiz answers? Why or why not?

## Chapter 7: Things Aren’t Working Out (pages 69–79)

For many middle school students, going out with a boyfriend or girlfriend is a rite of passage. That’s totally normal, but because tweens and teens often have limited communication skills, they may not know how to create and maintain healthy relationships. You can help students raise the bar on their standards for healthy relationships by doing the activities in this chapter.

**Page 69. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jack’s trying to be a good friend and a good boyfriend. Ask students: How’s Jack doing in each of his relationships? If you’ve ever been in this situation (either side), how did it feel?

**Page 71. You Say What?** The “Fake Promises” feature has tips for readers to help them stay away from saying things they don’t mean. Ask students whether they have ever made fake promises. Ask: What happened in the end? Would it have just been better to tell the truth?

**Page 72. Take the Quiz!** The “Real or Fake Promise?” quiz features five promises, and readers must decide if they are sincere. Read each of the promises aloud, asking students to answer Real or Fake on a piece of paper. Go over the answers and discuss. Talk about what might happen to the trust in a friendship when one person or both continually make fake promises.

**Page 75. Let’s Do This.** The “Your Rights” feature has a list of items tweens and teens should expect in all of their relationships. Encourage students to talk about why each of these rights is essential for healthy relationships. Ask students to create a “Relationship Bill of Rights” in small groups.

**Pages 77. You Say What?** “From the ‘Broken Up’ Files” features tween and teen quotes about relationships ending. Even when no one means to hurt anyone’s feelings, the end of relationships can be tough on both people. Ask whether people in your group feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

**Pages 78. You Say What?** “Moving On” features tween and teen quotes about moving beyond breakups. Read the quotes as a group and ask students to share how they feel about the advice. Ask those in your group what advice they could offer to other teens for moving on.

## Chapter 8: Making New Friends (pages 80–89)

Middle school is the time of tremendous physical, intellectual, and social change. It’s as normal for students to slowly “outgrow” old friendships as it is for them to experience a sudden (and often devastating) breakup. You can use the activities in this section to help students who may be “shopping” for new friends. Emphasize throughout the importance of keeping an open mind.

**Page 80. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Mateo shares what he saw at the mall and the other kids feel more empathy for Monique. Talk about the need for empathy and the danger of snap judgments. Encourage your students to talk about snap judgments they’ve made about others. Ask: Were you right or wrong about the person?

**Page 82. Take the Quiz!** The “Do You Make Snap Decisions?” quiz features true or false questions for readers about whether they’re quick to draw conclusions about others. Read each of the questions, asking students to answer T or F on a piece of paper. Have students tally answers and provide feedback based on answers at the bottom of the page. Ask: What, if anything, surprised you about your score? If someone wanted to make fewer “snap decisions” about other people, what might they do to help themselves change?

**Page 85. You Say What?** The “5 Ways to Make Friends” feature has tips readers can use to connect with people outside of their current circle of friends. Ask students: What do you think of this advice? What other ways have you discovered that help you make new friends?

## Book 3:

# What's Up with My Family



The third book in the Middle School Confidential series features the characters trying to negotiate family rules, routines, and responsibilities. Readers will find insider tips for getting along with parents and handling common concerns that come up at home—including dealing with sibling conflicts, coping with divorce and life in a blended family, and being assertive when adults are genuinely unfair.

## Introduction (pages 2–7)

**Pages 2–7. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jen's dad seems like he may be kind of strict. Ask students in your group: Have you ever been grounded? Did it seem fair to you at the time? How about looking back?

## Chapter 1: I'm Not a Little Kid Anymore! (pages 8–18)

Tweens and teens are doing their "job" when they push back against parents (and other adults). You can help students by letting them know that adults at home have a job, too. Parents are hardwired to protect their kids and try to keep them safe. Activities in this section can help young people begin to see this and work more with (rather than against) their families.

**Pages 8, 12, and 15. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Mateo is fed up with all the questions he gets from his family. He feels like everyone is always in his business. Ask students in your group: What's the difference between younger kids and tweens when it comes to the need for privacy and trust from parents? In the past, when you felt you needed "more space" from your parents, how did you let them know?

**Page 10. You Say What?** "From the 'Give Me a Break' Files" features quotes from tweens and teens fed up with their families. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. When the reading is done, ask young people in your group which quotes they can most relate to. Ask: If none of these quotes strikes a chord, what is one you would add to the "Give Me a Break" files?



**Page 14. You Say What?** Page 14 features “5 Tips for Getting More Responsibility.” Ask tweens and teens in your group to take the point of view of parents (or other adults at home) and answer this question: What’s the connection between being more responsible and getting more freedom?

## Chapter 2: Fuel-ish Thinking (pages 19–29)

Students can benefit from safe and open conversations about family life. While they probably already recognize that no two families are the same, it can help them to be reminded that we all want our feelings to be respected by the people in our family. This chapter has ideas for helping them communicate this with family adults.

**Page 21. Break It Down.** “Hey! Don’t My Feelings Count?” features quotes from tweens and teens who seem to have legitimate complaints about how they’re treated at home. The problem is that parents often don’t really hear what’s being said when their children use angry words. Ask students in your group to read the quotes aloud. Follow-up by asking how each quote might be rephrased so that the teen has a better chance of changing the situation at home.

**Page 23. You Say What?** In the character story line, Abby begins to realize that a lot of the angry thoughts directed toward her mother may not be so helpful. Ask students in your group: What are fuel-ish thoughts? Can you think of some examples from a conflict you’ve had with a family member? Has fuel-ish thinking ever impacted your choices?

**Page 25. Take the Quiz!** The “Is It Fuel-ish Thinking?” quiz allows readers to examine the toll runaway negative thoughts can have. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer Yes or No for the statements on a piece of paper. Afterward, discuss the answers and talk about disagreements. Ask: If we can agree that fuel-ish thinking doesn’t help you or the situation you’re in, how might you do a better job tuning out or shutting down fuel-ish thoughts? How might you help your friends do the same?

**Page 27. Let’s Do This.** The “Give Some Forgiveness” feature has steps readers can use to get past family slights and hurts. Guide students through this activity, assuring them they will not have to share out loud. Encourage tweens and teens to think about forgiving others whenever they can (rather than carry around resentment).

## Chapter 3: Things Are Changing Around Here (pages 30–40)

For tweens and teens, so much at school and among friends has probably changed over the past few years. Changes in families can add tremendous challenges to the emotional well-being of your students. You can help them by letting them know that change happens in life and in families and things that used to be “the norm” may not be the same anymore. It’s also important they know that change isn’t necessarily a bad thing, it’s just different and can take getting used to. This chapter can help reinforce this message.

**Pages 30, 35, and 38. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Chris struggles to adjust to life in a stepfamily, but in the end it seems like he may be coming around. Ask whether there is anyone in your group who feels comfortable sharing their experiences about divorce, stepfamilies, or other family changes.

**Page 31. You Say What?** “Things Are Different Now . . .” features quotes from tweens and teens dealing with family transitions. Ask students to read these quotes aloud. When the reading is done, encourage them to talk about their own experiences with family changes. Share experiences of your own.

**Pages 32–33. Take the Quiz!** The “How Flexible Are You?” quiz features multiple-choice questions about how well tweens and teens are able to adjust to tough circumstances at home. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer a, b, c, or d. After the quiz, go over the answers on page 33, encouraging young people to share what they have written. Ask them to share personal experiences when flexible responses to family situations made things better at home (or when inflexible responses made things worse).



THINGS CAN GET TOUGH IN A FAMILY.

**Page 34. You Say What?** “Stay Out of Fight Mode” features tips for staying cool in challenging family situations. Ask students: What do you think of these tips? Have you used any of them successfully? What are other tips you would offer for staying calm during times of change?

## Chapter 4: That’s So Unfair (pages 41–50)

Activities in this section can help you build rapport with tweens and teens in your group. Let students know that you remember what it was like to be younger and feel that the adults in charge were “unfair.” Talk about how it’s normal to feel some resentment at times they don’t like their parents’ rules. Activities in this section can help affirm this important message: Learning to stay calm, trying to negotiate, and accepting what you can’t change are all part of becoming more mature.

**Pages 41, 44, and 48. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jen pushes back against her dad’s rules on dating. Ask students in your group: What do you think about Jen’s situation? How about the way she handled it? Can you think of a time when you pushed back against family rules? What happened?

**Page 45. Let’s Do This.** “Does It Run in the Family?” offers insight into why family adults might parent the way they do. Encourage students to interview a parent or grandparent to better understand where adults at home might be coming from. Ask tweens and teens to create a list of questions they can use for the interview. (For example, “What were your parents’ rules when you were my age?”) Have young people conduct the interviews (written, audio, video) and share them with the class.

**Page 46. You Say What?** “Here’s What I’m Going to Do” features quotes from tweens and teens who are trying to get around rules that have been set by their families. Read these quotes as a group. Ask students whether the kids who have been quoted have good plans. Share a time when you thought you had a good plan but then later realized it wasn’t so smart.

## Chapter 5: Moods and Attitudes (pages 51–60)

It’s normal for all people to sometimes get into a bad mood. It’s important for young people to know that you and other adults recognize that adolescence is often accompanied by mood swings. The expectation is not that tweens and teens always be bright and cheery, but respectfulness is important. This chapter offers ideas for dealing with changes in mood in constructive ways.

**Page 51. Break It Down.** In the character story line, the panel of experts tries to come up with some advice for Rena to help her get out of her bad mood. But that proves easier said than done. Ask students: What happens when the experts try to come up with advice for Rena? How would you suggest she get out of her bad mood? What works for you?

**Page 52. You Say What?** “I Don’t Feel Like Being Nice” features quotes from tweens and teens who are definitely in a bad mood. Read these quotes as a group. Ask whether anybody feels comfortable sharing about a time they didn’t feel like being nice. Share a story of your own about someone or something putting you in a bad mood.

**Page 53. Take the Quiz!** The “Bad Mood Trigger?” quiz features questions to get tweens and teens thinking about things that might put them in a negative mood. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer Yes, No, or Maybe for questions on a piece of paper. Afterward, have them tally up their scores and give them the feedback based on the scoring system at the bottom of the page. Ask: Are you more often or less often in a bad mood these days than say, a year ago? What helped you unplug from a bad mood?

**Page 59. Let’s Do This.** The “Making Changes” feature has ideas readers can use to break unhealthy behaviors and communication habits at home. Administer this activity to the group, asking students to privately record their answers. Encourage tweens and teens to share the project with their families. Also recommend they keep a journal to record any positive changes at home.

## Chapter 6: When Someone Is Gone (pages 61–70)

Some of the students you teach or advise may be dealing with catastrophic upheavals in their family life. That might include the deployment of a parent overseas, a relative in trouble with the law, the serious illness or death of a loved one, divorce, or one of many other situations. It's normal at these times for middle school students to feel upset, ashamed, worried, or afraid. It's also common for them to hide what they're feeling. Make sure your classroom is a supportive environment when you talk about the issues in this chapter.

**Pages 61 and 65. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Michelle is feeling like she's really missed out by not having her father around. Ask students in your group what they think of Michelle's situation and her plan to see the person she's been missing for so many years. Ask how they feel about Michelle's mom's reaction? Ask students in your group: Can you think of a time when you needed to find out the truth about a family situation and at the same time felt scared?

**Page 62. You Say What?** "Part of My Family Is Missing . . ." features tween and teen quotes on what it's like to have an absent family member. Read these quotes as a group. Ask whether anybody feels comfortable sharing how they feel about a situation like this in their own lives.

**Page 63. Take the Quiz!** The "True or False?" quiz is an individual assessment but can be administered to groups. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer T or F for questions on a piece of paper. Follow-up the quiz with a discussion. Ask young people to share their answers. If differences of opinion come up, talk together about why this might be.

**Page 66. Let's Do This.** The "Tips for Moving Forward" feature has ideas that can help readers move past difficult periods at home. Read these suggestions as a group and discuss how they might be helpful in tough times. Ask: What other tips would you add to this list?

**Page 69. Let's Do This.** The "Collecting Life Stories" section features tips readers can use to get the story behind the story of their parents' or grandparents' achievements, journeys, and memorabilia. Encourage students to record their families' stories (written, photographic, audio, or video) and share them with the class. You might also suggest they work on a family tree project in an effort to bring generations together.

## Chapter 7: Struggling with Siblings (pages 71–80)

Talk to your students about sibling rivalry. Tell them about your own experiences with siblings or cousins growing up. Let them know that feelings of jealousy and competition between siblings are absolutely normal, but that activities in this chapter can help everyone get along better. You might also point out that relationships with siblings often change (for the better) as we get older.

**Page 71. Break It Down.** In the character story line, Jack and his little sister are having some issues. Ask your group whether anyone can relate to having struggles with their siblings. Follow-up by asking: What's the most challenging part of dealing with your brother or sister? If you're an only child, what can be difficult about that?

**Page 72. You Say What?** "From the 'Most Annoying' Files" features quotes from tweens and teens who are fed up with their siblings. Ask students: If your sibling had a chance to point the finger at you for being "annoying" what might he or she say?

**Page 73. Take the Quiz!** The "My Sibling . . ." quiz features true or false questions about readers' brothers and sisters. Read each of the statements aloud, asking students to answer T or F for questions on a piece of paper. Ask them to tally their scores before the discussion. Ask: What do you think about the results? Accurate or not so much? If you could change something in your relationship with your sibling, what would that be?

**Page 77. You Say What?** "The Inside Scoop on Sib Order" features some of the potential pros and cons of being oldest, youngest, or in the middle. Ask students to brainstorm additional positive and negative aspects of these different positions in the family. Encourage the group to politely debate about who's got it easiest and who's got it hardest.

## Chapter 8: Let's Call a Truce (pages 81–89)

Helping your students focus on the positive aspects of being a part of their particular family can really make a big difference in the way they handle difficult situations with parents, siblings, and other people at home. This chapter is all about appreciating those who are there to love and support us.

**Page 81. Let's Do This.** In the character story line, Jack has to react fast to help his sister Amy. Ask students in your group to think of a time when you stepped in to help a family member or a family member helped you. Instead of having them talk about what happened, ask students to create a comic strip to tell the story (using as many panels as it takes). Ask students to share these comics with the class.

**Page 82. You Say What?** "We Are All in This Family" features quotes from tweens and teens showing appreciation for the people who live with and take care of them. Read these quotes as a group and talk about the upside of being in a family.

**Page 86. Let's Do This.** The "Family Meetings" feature has steps readers can take to get on the same page with family members. Talk about these steps with the tweens and teens in your group. With students taking different roles in a fictional "family," role-play a family meeting complete with an issue to be discussed and some realistic back and forth discussion. Encourage the group to come to a resolution.

## About the Author



Annie Fox, M.Ed., graduated from Cornell University with a degree in Human Development and Family Studies and completed her master's in Education at the State University of New York at Cortland. After a few years teaching in the classroom, she began to explore the ways in which technology could be used to empower teens.

Annie has since contributed to many online projects, including as creator, designer, and writer for the The InSite—a Web site for teens taking on life's challenges. Annie also answers questions for the Hey Terra! feature, an online advisor. Her Internet work has contributed to the publication of multiple books, including *Too Stressed to Think?* and the Middle School Confidential series.

Annie is available for public speaking engagements and workshop presentations on teen and parenting issues.

When not answering Hey Terra! letters, Annie enjoys yoga, meditation, cooking, hiking, traveling, and, most of all, spending time with her husband David and the rest of the family.

## About the Illustrator



Matt Kindt was born in 1973 to a pair of artistically supportive parents. Living briefly in New York, Matt has spent most of his years in the Midwest, and the last 15 years in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. In middle school, he would often create mini-comics featuring the teachers, to the delight of his fellow classmates. Matt is the Harvey Award-winning writer and artist of the graphic novels *Super Spy* and *2 Sisters* and co-creator of the Pistolwhip series. He has been nominated for four Eisner and three Harvey Awards. In addition to graphic novels, Matt also works as a freelance illustrator and graphic designer. When he is not working, Matt enjoys long trips to the playground with his wife and daughter.

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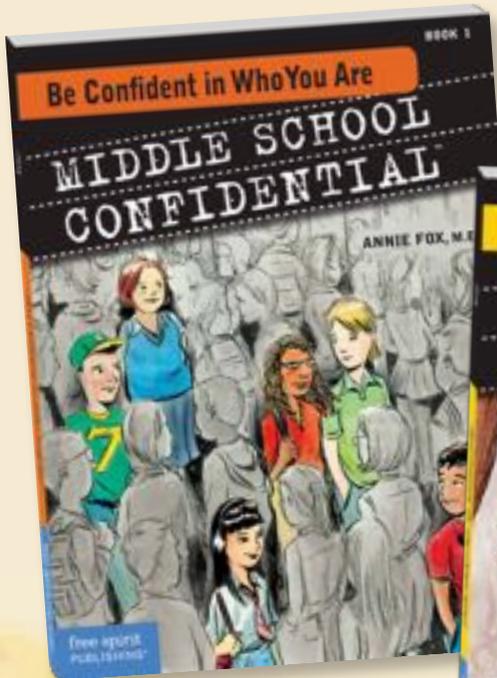
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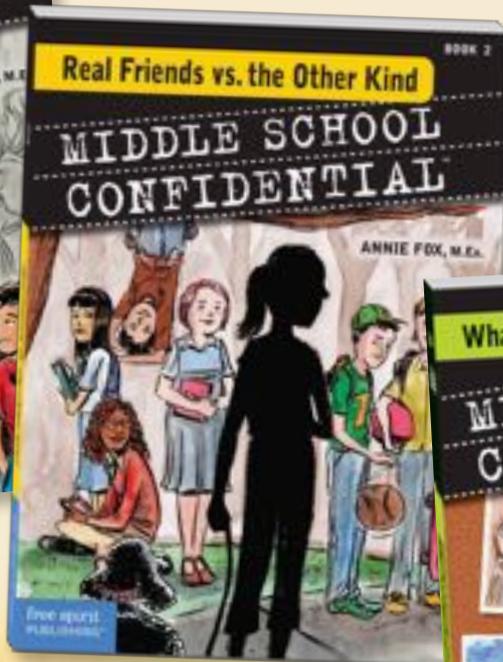
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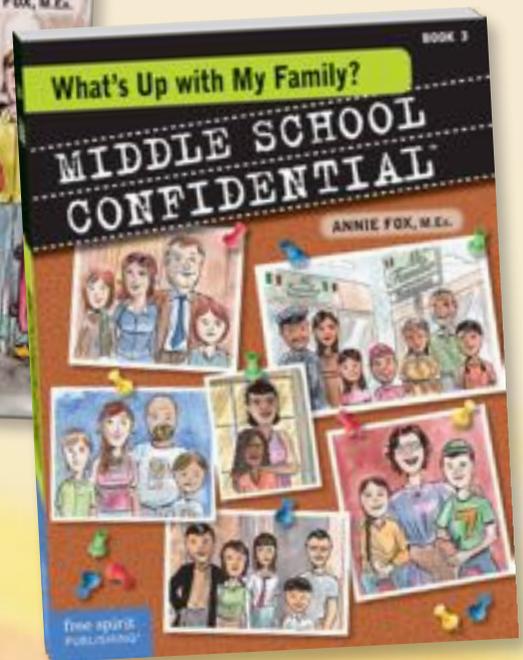
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