

Mom Made Us Write This in the Summer

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Funny, tell-all journal entries of ten-year-old twins reveals the inner workings of sibling and family relationships as can only be seen through the eyes of children.

Ten-year-old twins Max and Maggie Pruitt wrote a shared journal over the summer. Why? As Max explains, their mom is “a little obsessed with reading and writing” and came up with this summer project to end their squabbling and help them better understand one another. The result is a funny collection of personal narratives in *Mom Made Us Write This in the Summer*.

The visually dynamic journal entries realistically portray the language and viewpoint of ten-year-olds. While both children's entries display good grammar and handwriting, there are obvious differences that provide insight into their personalities. Maggie's writing is straight and tall. Her illustrations are equally neat, and many of her doodles are of little hearts, including those that dot her “I's.” Max's writing is shorter, rounder and darker, while his illustrations are full of bold lines and shading. This obvious difference in their “handwriting” makes it clear who is writing the journal entry, and the comments that appear around it as the children offer feedback on one another's work.

The entries offer strong characterizations about the children, as seen in the subject “Grandparents and Things.” Maggie's gift from her grandparents includes chocolate caramels and shoes she can decorate with pens. Max's creative side is also encouraged with a new stash of paper clips, push pins and rubber bands—perfect for inventing projectiles to launch around the house.

Targeted to an audience of second- to fifth-graders, the book includes a variety of potty humor, most emphasized in a zoo visit that has Max cracking up about hippo poop and farts. There are also some tender and thoughtful moments that convey the bond between the siblings, and the family as a whole, in entries about special outings or activities, such as ice cream day.

Because Max and Maggie both write on the same topic, their differences and similarities in the way they perceive and respond to the same situation is emphasized. For example, when their mother has a long talk with them about disrupting her business call, Maggie starts to cry. This, in turn, makes their mother cry. Max doesn't react emotionally, causing Maggie to accuse him of “being clueless.” Max confirms he had “no idea what just happened” and states all the crying was just “an overreaction.” As the summer progresses, Max and Maggie reveal a greater understanding of one another. Their journal entries and critiques become more supportive, like when Max thanks Maggie for supporting him at his baseball game.

Mom Made Us Write This In the Summer offers affectionate and amusing stories from the point of view of a ten-year-old brother and sister.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (October 1, 2013)

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