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Juvenile Fiction

Zeke Meeks vs the Putrid Puppet Pals
D.L. Green
Capstone
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Zeke Meeks is the only kid in his third grade class who's not obsessed with the latest trend. When his best friend, Hector, pipes up with the theme song ("Puppet Pals are so much fun, for just about everyone") and wearing the collectible finger puppets instead of playing basketball with Zeke, he's both angry and disappointed. Not wanting to give in to the fad, yet tired of being on the outside, Zeke gives up precious allowance money, only to discover the puppets are exactly as boring as he thought they would be. It's only a matter of time before a new trend comes along, but meanwhile Zeke tries to get Hector back out on the basketball court and away from the "putrid" Puppet Pals.

Zeke Meeks vs. the Putrid Puppet Pals bears a passing resemblance to Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, with bold black-and-white illustrations by Josh Alves that sometimes move the story forward, and other times comment on what has just been described. But author D.L. Green has a harder task than Kinney in some ways, because Zeke Meeks is an entirely likable kid who, while possessing more common sense than his entire class in school, is never a jerk about it. Not even once! He patiently tries to talk Hector into playing basketball, but also meets him halfway and tries to play with Puppet Pals because they're important to his friend. (In the same circumstance, *Wimpy Kid*'s Greg Heffley would probably have stolen a monster truck and run over his entire grade from sheer frustration). Despite having such a nice-guy narrator, the book scores some solid laughs, particularly when Zeke's younger sister, Mia, appears. Addicted to a show called "Princess Sing-Along," she's constantly imparting rhyming couplets of wisdom capped with the show's signature "la la la," and they are consistently ridiculous.

Young readers not yet ready for the *Wimpy Kid* series may find a friend in Zeke Meeks. There's a thoughtful lesson about trends and advertising, some funny playground dynamics, a hearty appreciation of outdoor play, and lots of laughs throughout. Oh, and if Zeek's distaste for

puppets fails to infect readers, there are instructions at the end of the book so readers can make their own puppet pals, along with a glossary to clarify difficult words. Here's hoping Zeke Meeks inherits, well, if not the whole Earth, then at least a few more adventures.

Heather Seggel