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The Vorlob family is getting ready for the new baby, soon to arrive. The preparations include painting a mural in the baby's nursery and making a list of possible names. Since ten-year-old Adine already has four younger sisters, she is used to the routine. This time, however, the routine is broken -- in more ways than one. The biggest change is that Aunt Irene will be staying with the Vorlobs until Adine's mother is back on her feet. Aunt Irene arrives, as does the baby, but nothing else goes quite as expected. Especially for Adine!

The Zebra Wall Details

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From Reader Review *The Zebra Wall* for online ebook

Josiah says

By the time *The Zebra Wall* was published—Kevin Henkes's third novel—the author had begun refining his style, getting closer to the form he would show two decades later in winning a 2004 Newbery Honor for *Olive's Ocean*. Ten-year-old Adine Vorlob is the eldest of five platinum-blond sisters awaiting the arrival of a sixth child in the family. Mrs. Vorlob's sister is temporarily moving in to help care for the newborn, but Adine isn't pleased; Aunt Irene is bossy, and can be insensitive to the girls' feelings. Her husband recently divorced her, though, and Adine's mother believes that Aunt Irene needs them every bit as much as Mrs. Vorlob could use an adult caretaker in addition to Mr. Vorlob. Having Aunt Irene claim Adine's bedroom for an indefinite period of time is a sacrifice, but Adine is willing to make it for her hardworking mother.

The baby comes a month premature, but in good health for a preemie. It's a tiny, spindly creature with hardly the strength to cry, but the newborn settles in at home with minimal agitation. Now the task is picking a name in accordance with the Vorlob naming tradition. Adine was born first, followed by now eight-year-old Bernice, seven-year-old Carla, four-year-old Dot, and two-year-old Effie. The next in succession must have a name beginning with F, though completing the alphabet is unlikely for a mother whose pregnancies are already ending before the due date. The Vorlobs and Aunt Irene brainstorm a flurry of "F" names, but the momma is choosy, and the name has to sit just right in her mind. How long will they call the crib's inhabitant "Baby" before Mrs. Vorlob decides?

Loath to add to her mother's stress, Adine strives to live at peace with Aunt Irene, but the woman is cantankerous in the aftermath of her divorce. Adine desires alone time with her mother and new sibling, but Aunt Irene interferes. Bernice and Carla are tired of their aunt, too, and wouldn't mind telling her, but Adine restrains them from crossing lines that can't be uncrossed. Aunt Irene is family, and they have to treat her civilly or end up in a worse situation. After an incident at school Adine is at the boiling point with her aunt and wants her gone, but people are often more vulnerable than they let on, and revenge against a person in deep pain is hollow reward. We are each our own lonely planet, spinning aimlessly in a cold, dark universe, but we can take comfort that a few friends and family members orbit the same central object, however far apart we may be. Perhaps Adine and Aunt Irene will come to see they aren't so different even though their personalities clash, and that family closeness is a blessing even when it feels like nothing more than a chore. There's a lot of life ahead, and Adine is on the road toward it.

Kevin Henkes doesn't write thrills or twists; he's more Judy Blume than Neal Shusterman. But *The Zebra Wall* is good, a reflection on turmoil within and without, told with the uncompromising realism that marks all the author's novels. Authenticity is more important to him than synthesizing a perfect moment to cap the story, and that's why I love what Kevin Henkes does. It's as if he's creating life, a miracle every author strives for but few come close to achieving. Is there any act as awesome as the creation of life *ex nihilo*? *The Zebra Wall* isn't as powerful as some of Henkes's later novels, but I rate it two and a half stars, and considered rounding up to three. The story will linger with me for some time.

Megan says

This was a cute story, but I really kept wincing over all the SIDS risks for the new baby (which really dates this book)...smoking in the house, covering the baby with a quilt while he was in the crib, etc. The mom even

started smoking again the minute she got home from the hospital! I really liked how the whole family collaborated on naming the new sibling and painting the nursery wall, as they did for each new sibling.

Katie Fitzgerald says

This review also appears on my blog, [Read-at-Home Mom](#).

Adine is the oldest of five sisters, all of whom have been named in alphabetical order. Her mother is expecting a new baby, and everyone just assumes it will be a girl. When their mother's labor begins a month early, the girls begin to prepare the nursery with an F-themed decor, according to family tradition, and all of the girls eagerly anticipate meeting their new little sister. When the baby turns out to be a boy, no one - including Adine's mom, who is deemed unable to have anymore children - knows quite how to react. In the meantime, Adine locks horns with her aunt Irene, who comes to help out the family, but whose husky body, obsession with cats, and pushy attitude embarrass Adine.

Everything about this book is very 80s. The cover features children wearing hairstyles and clothing long forgotten, and the adults in the story smoke in front of the kids. Parents are not yet able to find out the sex of their unborn children during routine ultrasounds, and they photograph their children using Polaroid cameras. The kids play with Cabbage Patch Preemies and Fisher Price people and there are references to Willard Scott's regular appearances on the Today show. For adults, the nostalgia abounds, but kids are unlikely to feel the same sense of warmth toward these now-obscure references.

As a story, it has much in common with sit-coms of the day. Aunt Irene is so outlandish, she is nearly a caricature. Her gruffness and her obsession with cats seem like such cliched characteristics to give to an unpleasant relative, and though she is redeemed and even appreciated by the end of the story, she still lacks the depth that Henkes gives to other characters in his later novels. But really, the thrill of reading this book comes from the knowledge that Henkes does go on to write much better stories. It is remarkable that the same man who writes such lyrical novels as *Olive's Ocean* and *Junonia* is also the author of this light sitcom of a novel. To note the evolution from this book to those is just so interesting.

The Zebra Wall is a fun family story, and it is a lot like *Ten Kids*, *No Pets and Eleven Kids*, *One Summer*, two novels by Ann M. Martin which I read over and over again in childhood. Even the alphabetical names are common to both families. I don't think *The Zebra Wall* holds up too well for today's audiences, but anyone who can remember the late 80s should get a kick out of it.

Kathryn says

I keep reading Lila's books, and it's fun to read children's literature that I haven't read before. I only knew Kevin Henkes as a picture book guy, not a chapter book guy. Loved this book and thought it captured nicely how it can be tough being ten.

Sydney says

I enjoyed book *The Zebra Wall*. I can relate to this book because Adine felt left out at some parts with her

whole family and that is what happens with my family sometimes.

I would definitely recommend this book to any of my friends that enjoy to read about family and family problems.

The Zebra Wall is about the Vorlob already having kids but they are expecting another one. The family wants to have their kids have their name going in alphabetical order. They have A, B, C, D, and E but when the sixth child came they wanted to switch it up since it might be their last. They have a mural wall but decide to change it all up when the new baby is gonna come. When their Aunt Irene comes to stay with the kids while the Vorlob parents are in the hospital the kids don't really like her at first. Since the Vorlob kids didnt like Aunt Irene right away they find away how to deal with her being there. In the end everything everything turns out different than what the Vorlob expected.

Nazareth says

as you see by the title it says 'zebra wall' you might think its going to talk about zebras or probably zebra stripes in the wall and by the cover of the book has zebra stripes , well theres more to what you think about the title . Once I saw this book I also thought it was going to be something dealing with zebras , zebra stripes but I was wrong , this book is talking about a mother who had 5 kids and the first letter of there names are going by the alphabet a,b,c,d,e and shes having another baby there kids are giving her names that start with the letter 'f' to go with the alphabet but she asked her Aunt Irene she can name her son but instead of naming him with a 'f' she named him with a 'z' and so all the mothers kids made a wall with names that started with a 'z' and called it the 'zebra wall' , and so when the baby came out they named him zachary , and I love this book so much because they made a twist into it , and in my opinion I think they named him with a 'z' was because that was the last baby she was going to have and the last letter of the alphabet was 'z'. -Nazareth Gonzalez

Jenny says

This is one of my favorite children's authors. This was another book by Kevin Henkes that illustrates the feelings and struggles of children in every day family situations. A fun read that reminds us that we can connect with people we are completely frustrated by!

Emma says

I wish the Zebra Wall stayed as the F wall. They worked so hard on it.

Gabrielle Hamouz says

The Zebra Wall was an okay book. I didn't enjoy it as much as I thought I would. The characters just were kinda wierd. The book was kind of all over the place. it was hard to tell who was who.

The book is about Adine's family preparing for a new baby coming to the family. They already have a pretty big family, the Volorbs have 5 girl daughter ages 0-10. Now they are bringing another child into the family. The Volorbs have a problem though, their Aunt Irene is staying with them until there mom gets better after the baby is born. The whole family likes Aunt Irene except Adine, the whole trip didn't go very smooth for Adone and we Aunt.

This book was definitely for older people like 12 and up because the adults in the book were always smoking cigarettes by the children. But I wouldn't really suggest this book to anyone.

Danna says

This was my favorite story as a child. It was the first that really spoke to me internally. I will get this for my daughter or son when it comes to that time as well.

Kricket says

when i was a little kid, my older sister read me this book in a fort we built out of blankets in the basement. so rediscovering this book came with all kinds of nostalgia for me. it's about a girl named adine with four little sisters and a new baby on the way. her recently divorced aunt irene comes to share a bedroom with her and help with the baby, but it's a big adjustment for the whole family.

i think readers today would be astonished to find adults smoking in front of kids, but other than that its held up pretty well over the years.

Liz says

Rereading books before I give them away.

Mehsi says

Not sure if it is a 1 or 2 stars, so I will give it a 1.5 stars.

The characters, urgh, I didn't like any of them. Adine was just an annoying, whiny little kid. Irene (even at the end with what she did) was just blergh and I hated her and how she did things. The parents are bleh. The sisters? I just kept being confused as to who was who. Then we had a cat, which also confused stuff.

You can also clearly see the age of this book. Parents smoking near their kids? Near a baby? An aunt who just smokes brown cigarettes a lot and doesn't care if people are bothered? (Until of course there is a magical sign, then she apparently gets it.) Sure, there are parents who smoke nowadays too, but you mostly won't read about it in the book.

The name thing? Poor baby, being called Baby for several months until someone finally decided on a name.

The story? Well what story? There is not much story, and I was pretty bored at times.

The one thing I did like was that they made a new mural/wall for each baby, with objects/stuff that started with the first letter of their name.

All in all, I wouldn't recommend this one.

Review first posted at <http://twirlingbookprincess.com/>

Deb says

I'm guessing young readers will be able to relate to the things Adine feels at how she's treated in her family – whether real or imagined. But I don't think I've ever read a book with more mention of smoking. I not sure why that was important to the story. Possibly readers from a smoking family can sympathize, but all of the smoking that went on around that newborn baby made me cringe. I wanted to like this story, and it had moments where I really did, but overall it left me with an un satisfied, slightly depressing feeling about the family.

Danni Green says

Wow, what a weird book! I loved this one as a kid and wanted to go back and visit it again. It was comforting in the way that rereading an old favorite often is, but I have no clue what the appeal was. None of the characters are especially likeable. The adults are annoying at best. There are also a lot of very graphic descriptions of cigarette smoking, like I was starting to think Big Tobacco might have secretly funded this book? I had fun rereading it for the nostalgia, but I don't know that I'd *recommend* it.
