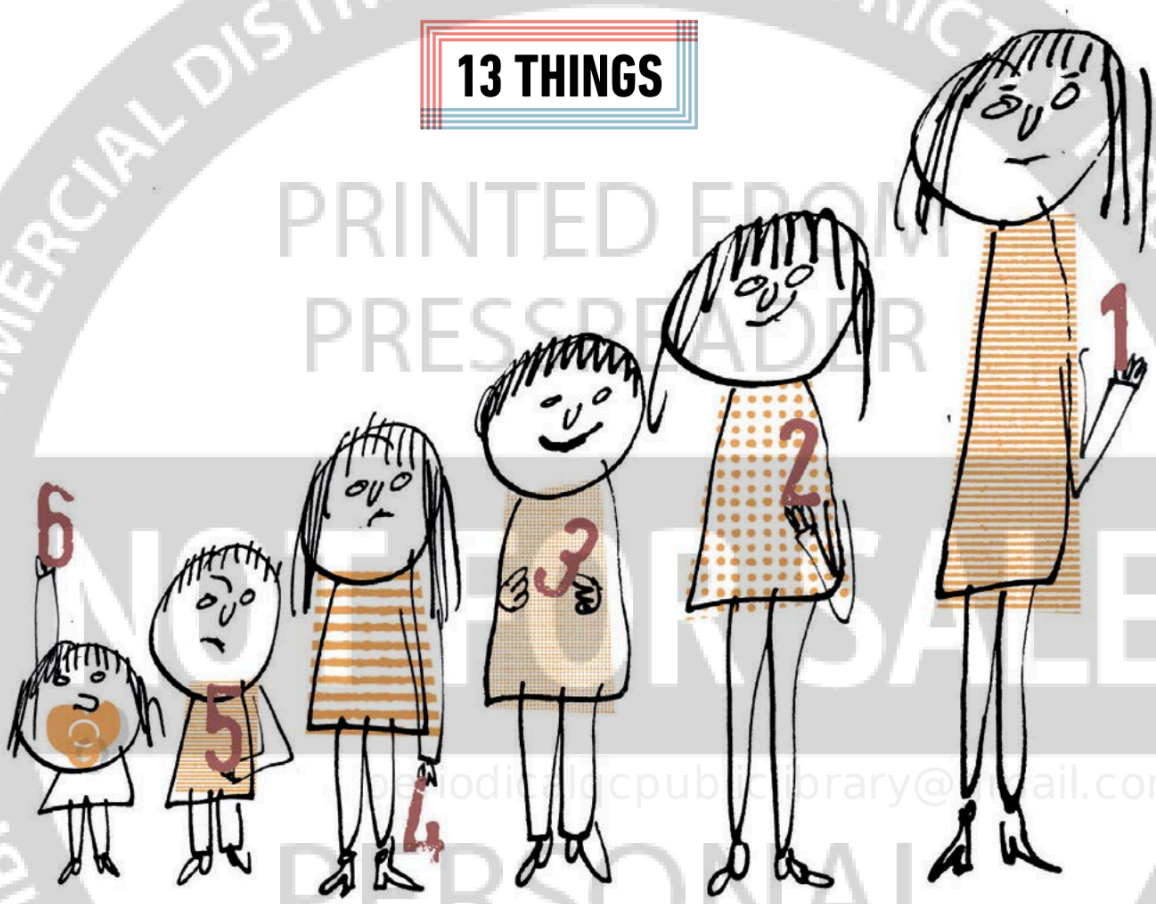
- Birth order

13 THINGS



Birth Order Facts to Spark Sibling Rivalry

BY *Charlotte Hilton Andersen*

1 FIRST PROPOSED by psychiatrist Alfred Adler in the 1920s, birth order theory is the idea that where you fall in your family can determine major aspects of your personality. While it's not exactly a science, it does offer insights that seem to reaffirm conventional wisdom about sibling dynamics. Even when it doesn't describe you all that well, it's still fun to discuss—especially with your family.

2 ELDEST DAUGHTER syndrome refers to the parent-like responsibility first-born girls often feel toward their younger siblings. It can make them overachievers—but also anxious, guilt-ridden people pleasers. Think

ILLUSTRATION BY *Serge Bloch*

COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED • PRINTED FROM PRESSREADER • NOT FOR SALE • PERSONAL COPY

about Katniss Everdeen, from *The Hunger Games* series, who risks her life to save her little sister's. *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling (also an eldest daughter), has said the studious, rule-abiding Hermione is an amplified version of herself.

3 MANY CEOs and moguls are eldest children. Among them: Andrew Carnegie, Sheryl Sandberg and Oprah Winfrey. Firstborns also tend to get better grades and often have higher IQs than their siblings, but researchers link this to the fact that eldest kids are more likely to get extra attention and resources from parents, giving them a leg up.

4 YOUNGER SIBLINGS are often painted as carefree and lighthearted, maybe because they don't face the same expectations their older siblings do. Take Princes William and Harry: William is more straight-laced (and poised to become king), while Harry was able to step away from his royal duties.

5 THE COMEDIANS Jim Carrey, Billy Crystal, Kevin Hart, Martin Short, Sarah Silverman and Ali Wong are all the youngest of their siblings. Coincidence? Maybe, but youngest children are the ones most often described as the "funniest family member," according to a YouGov survey.

6 DID YOU think we forgot middle children? Apparently, everyone does. It's so common that it has a name: middle-child syndrome. There's debate as to whether this is a real phenomenon or just a feeling that many middle children experience. Ironically, there aren't many studies on it. Case in point: That YouGov survey cited above asked only about the oldest and youngest, completely ignoring middles.

7 CONTRARY TO the stereotype, only children aren't selfish or maladjusted. In fact, the American Psychological Association found that only kids measured similarly to kids with siblings on tests for sociability and emotional adjustment.

8 ONLY CHILDREN are often high achievers like first-borns and also highly imaginative—perhaps from having to amuse themselves without any siblings around. Think Natalie Portman, who went to Harvard but also excels as an actress. Ringo Starr, of Beatles fame, is another example.

9 DO YOU like dark chocolate? How about cilantro? If so, you are more likely to be a first- or second-born child. Eldest (and second-eldest) children are more likely to enjoy these flavours, according to a survey done by genetics testing company 23andMe.

COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED PRINTER FRIENDLY PREVIEW PERSONAL COPY periodicalqcpubliclibrary@gmail.com

One theory: Parents have more time (and patience) to encourage their first kids to try different foods, but they have less of both with each consecutive child.

10 BIRTH ORDER may impact what motivates you—or, at least, what did when you were a kid. A study published in the *Journal of Research in Personality* found that most eldest children approach tasks wanting to develop mastery, while younger ones care more about outperforming others, especially—you guessed it—their older siblings.

11 'LITTLE SIBLING effect' describes a phenomenon observed across many sports: Younger siblings have a better chance of becoming elite athletes. Their advantage seems to stem from playing with their big siblings as children. A 2010 study compared 700 sets of brothers who played Major League Baseball. For the most part, the younger brothers had better batting averages. Another classic case: Tennis legend Serena Williams enjoyed a more decorated career than big sister Venus.

12 LATER-BORNS ALSO tend to have stronger immune systems, thanks to their older siblings exposing them to more germs as kids. Jeanne Calment, who made it to age 122 and was the oldest person to ever live, was a youngest child. Being exposed to more illnesses as a kid may decrease the risk of cancer later in life. A study published in the *International Journal of Cancer* found that each increase in birth order brought with it a 13 per cent lower risk of developing a type of potentially deadly brain tumour.

13 WHILE BIRTH order doesn't define us, it can provide compelling explanations for some of our behaviours. Are you an only child who eats slowly because you never had to fight for seconds, or an eldest child who always picks where the group eats because you're used to assuming a leadership role? What does your status explain about you? If you don't know, call your sibling. R

Learn as You Sleep

Nine Hours, a chain of 13 hotels across Japan, has an unusual by-product: sleep data. In two of their brances, guests can sign up for a '9h sleep fitscan' service, where sensors detect everything from breathing to facial expressions to generate a sleep report that tracks their heart rate, sleep apnea and even snoring.

BBC.COM