



Activity Ideas

Less Than Zero
Negative Numbers
Level 3, Ages 7+

Stuart J. Murphy
MathStart®

**“Storybooks that make
math fun!”**

The introduction of negative numbers extends a child's knowledge of the number system and is an important concept in algebra.

It is so much fun to be a penguin—especially when you can swirl around on your very own ice scooter. Perry really wants one, but they cost 9 clams and he doesn't have a clam to his name. Then mom pays him 4 clams to trim the ice in front of their house. Perry decides to make a chart to track his savings. So far, so good! But then he goes to the Ice Circus with Fuzzy and it costs 5 clams. Fuzzy lends him the extra clam and now Perry is in debt and has to mark his chart at -1. When Baldy loans him 2 clams for a Fishy Float, the total dips even further, to -3. Will Perry be able to climb out of negative number territory, pay back his friends, and make enough money for a scooter? Good thing there's always plenty of snow to shovel! Illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz.

- After reading the story together, take another look at the graphs. Have your child, or class, retell the story by looking at the graphs to see what happened to Perry's clams.
- Have your child pretend to be Perry, saving up for an ice-scooter. Using buttons or other small objects to represent clams, act out the story. Create a graph like the one Perry uses (days of the week on one axis and numbers from -4 to 10 on the other), making sure to highlight the zero line.
- Create a number line that includes numbers from -4 to 10 on a long sheet of paper. Highlight the zero and its point on the line. As you reread the story, keep track of Perry's clams using a marker. Start with the marker on zero. When Perry gains some clams, move the marker to the right to reach the correct number. When Perry spends or loses his clams, move the marker to the left. After each move, ask, "How many clams does Perry have now? Are there more than zero? Less than zero?" (You can also use a small object, such as a button or penny, to track Perry's progress on the number line.)

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