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## Going your own way

*Zilly reinforces an important concept*

by: Sari Judge on Thursday 04/12/2012

Last week I took my nine-year-old daughter to **Twilight Wednesday**, the Madison Children's Museum's free admission event on the first hump day of each month. Talk about happening. It was like a dry Mardi Gras or Vegas for kids under eight; wild, zany, everyone having a good time. I'm pretty sure some of the little ones running around were whispering "What happens at the Children's Museum stays at the Children's Museum," to each other.

But we weren't just there for a run on the human hamster wheel (much more exhausting than it looks) or a dalliance in the Shadow Room. My daughter and I had specifically come to check out Madison-area artist Kelly Parks Snider's launch of her new picture book, **Zilly: A Modern-Day Fable**. And we weren't disappointed. Because the book, while more likely targeted to kids younger than my fourth grade daughter, made good on its subtitle promise. It contained a valuable lesson for a 21st century girl on the brink of turning 10.

Zilly, the heroine of the story, is a free-spirited, quirky flyer. I'll be honest, I never really figured out what, exactly, a flyer was, but this didn't seem to bother any of the younger kids in the room. Her best friend is a tutu-

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wearing goat named Mingle who loves Zilly just the way she is. But when other flyers tease her for being different, Zilly succumbs to peer (flyer?) pressure and signs up for flying lessons for flyers who want to fit it. Unfortunately, no goats are allowed. Along the way, Zilly learns quite a bit about the power of staying true to herself and to her real friends.

The gorgeous picture book is filled to the brim with whimsical, brightly colored illustrations; they impressively embrace the "fine" part of fine art. But it was the message of Zilly that really resonated with me as the mother of a daughter. An outgrowth of Project Girl -- the award-winning initiative that combines art and media literacy into a unique educational experience for children -- the book shines a direct light on the effect of media messages in our society.



There is no question the media is powerful in sculpting young girls ideas of what they should look like and how they should act. What young girl wouldn't think the latest Barbie she saw advertised on Saturday morning TV could change her life? And what tween could resist the urge to download [Bridgit Mendler's](#) new single from iTunes. It is after all, what the artist asked her to do on break during a *Good Luck, Charlie* marathon. The media's influence is hard to escape. And, to be honest, I'm not even sure my daughter wants to.



But last week, while at the book launch, she got to spend a few minutes thinking about Zilly's words, "I like being me, and I'm exactly the way I am supposed to be."


And I think she feels this way right now.


But maybe we'll keep a copy of *Zilly* by her bedside in the years to come. Because I want her to remember the lessons of the fable if and when she confronts her own gaggle of "mean girl" flyers in middle school.

And it never hurts to have a little reminder to be nice to the goats in your life.

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 **Lily Howard**  
Thanks for the great article! I love Zilly too!  
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