



Stuart J. Murphy's  
**MathStart**<sup>®</sup>

**Less Than Zero**  
**Level 3 / Ages 7+**  
**Negative Numbers**



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

### Story Description

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

Illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz.

### Activities

- After reading the story, return to the graphs. Have your class (or child) retell the story by looking at the graphs to see what happened to Perry's clams.
- Create a number line that includes numbers from -4 to 10 on a long sheet of paper. As you reread the story, keep track of Perry's clams by using a marker on the number line (a button or a penny will also work). 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 to change the number. After each move, ask, "How many clams does Perry have now?"
- Have your students (or child) write down the amount each receives for an allowance in a notebook. Then have them keep a running account of the money they spend. Discuss what could happen if they wanted to make a purchase after the allowance is all spent.



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