

Book Banter

Summer 06

Adam Canfield of *The Slash* (Candlewick, 2005) is a fast-paced page-turner by Michael Winerip, a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the *New York Times*. This is Winerip's first novel for young readers. Adam Canfield and his friend Jennifer are reporters for their Elementary / Middle School newspaper, the *Slash*.

They uncover a plot by the city government to remove basketball hoops from driveways in several neighborhoods. They learn also that the people who own the newspaper in town own the television station as well, and dictate what appears in the newspaper. Finally, they discover that the principal of their school has been diverting educational donations to beautify her work space.

Adam Canfield of the *Slash* is full of laughs and intrigue, and shows great character-interactions among various grade levels. It would work as an excellent read-aloud in the lower grades. The book's double-spaced lines make the text quite accessible, and the narrative's fast pace and quick scene-changes should appeal to readers of all school ages.

Rebecca Moesta and Kevin J. Anderson are co-authors of a new trilogy invoking time travel. Their first in the series, ***Crystal Doors*** (Little, Brown, 2006), introduces teenage cousins—Vic and Gwen—who are accidentally warped to the island of Elantya. The cousins spend much of their time on the island in the Cogitary—a repository for scrolls of knowledge gathered from the many worlds connected by the *Crystal Doors*. The sprites who help the teens navigate the Cogitary are of course known as cogitarians!

There are fierce battles with vicious creatures and sea-dwelling merlons; there are magic spells, flying carpets, and Lyssandra, a very special telepath. This new friend will help Gwen and Vic discover their own mysterious roots in the yet to be published next novel in the trilogy. The atmosphere of this first entry is magical and the action fun. The book lends itself to consideration of how things are there versus how they are here. But above all, the tale is entertaining. We'll be waiting to read the sequels.



Born to Rock (Hyperion, 2006) is a new Young Adult novel by Gordon Korman. Leo Caraway, our protagonist, is a high school senior who has his whole future carefully planned out. He has already been accepted into Harvard with a full scholarship. Everything in his life changes, however, after he discovers that his biological father is Marion X. McMurphy (King Maggot!), the lead singer in a punk rock band. Leo is afraid that the McMurphy blood will raise havoc in his well-ordered life—and it does. Following several unforeseen events he ends up losing his scholarship and decides to approach King Maggot for a job to help pay for his education.



Leo spends an interesting summer on the road with his father, the band and the groupies who follow the band. He learns a lot about life, and also that flexibility—like advanced planning—has its own rewards. In this book Korman has created another absorbing tale filled with redirection and the unexpected—yet all of it quite believable. Like Korman's earlier works this book will definitely 'keep them reading'!

Come **Meet The Boomer Sisters!** (Arogue Press Book, 2005)—the title of a new and first novel by Dan Ward. JB is an eight year old dare devil. BJ, her sister, is just a year older and a little more cautious. The sisters and their parents have moved to a new town, which of course also means a new school and new friends. Right from the beginning they



discover that something is very strange about the school and town. Some of the teachers seem intent on changing the sisters' personalities, and in fact one of the sisters does succumb to this prevailing and strange new behavior: Like everyone else in town, she becomes dull! These people just want to work and have no play time. School becomes *un-fun*. All the books disappear from the library; the only ones left are hundreds of copies of *How Not To Be So Excited* and *Hey, Slow Down*. Uncle Q. and some concerned parents and teachers realize what's happening and take steps to bring about some necessary changes.

The morale of the tale is quite clear and will be perceived even by younger readers, but the “lesson” doesn’t overwhelm the entertaining narrative. This is an interesting and well written book, by a promising new author. **Meet The Boomer Sisters** will be enjoyed particularly by Middle Schoolers and should make a great read-aloud for Second and Third Graders as well.

What a marvelous way to study African American history—through a scrapbook! **Sienna’s Scrapbook: *Our African American Heritage Trip*** (Chronicle, 2005) is a work by Toni Trent Parker



centering on Sienna, a young New Englander, who has just finished her school year. Sienna and her family take a summer family trip from Hartford, Connecticut, their home, to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. They start by visiting the *Amistad* in

New Haven and wend their way through various landmarks key to African American history: New York State’s underground railroad, Montgomery Alabama’s tribute to Rosa Parks, and Washington DC’s Lincoln Memorial (to name a few). Janell Genovese, the illustrator of this graphic novel, combines photographs and child-like drawings and captions to keep in the tradition of a scrap book. The book concludes with an extensive bibliography of historical sites with street addresses, phone numbers and email addresses that would help any would-be traveler repeat this trip, or sections of it.

Parker and Genovese have made this book not only interesting but also useful for teaching both history and creative writing. Students will appreciate the format (and may very well feel inspired to create their own scrapbooks), and teachers will find many ways to make use of all the information. **Sienna’s Scrapbook** is an absorbing book—and a fascinating way for young readers to encounter history.

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