



Half Brother

Kenneth Oppel

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For thirteen years, Ben Tomlin was an only child. But all that changes when his mother brings home Zan — an eight-day-old chimpanzee. Ben's father, a renowned behavioral scientist, has uprooted the family to pursue his latest research project: a high-profile experiment to determine whether chimpanzees can acquire advanced language skills. Ben's parents tell him to treat Zan like a little brother. Ben reluctantly agrees. At least now he's not the only one his father's going to scrutinize.

It isn't long before Ben is Zan's favorite, and Ben starts to see Zan as more than just an experiment. His father disagrees. Soon Ben is forced to make a critical choice between what he is told to believe and what he knows to be true — between obeying his father or protecting his brother from an unimaginable fate.

Half Brother isn't just a story about a boy and a chimp. It's about the way families are made, the way humanity is judged, the way easy choices become hard ones, and how you can't always do right by the people and animals you love. In the hands of master storyteller Kenneth Oppel, it's a novel you won't soon forget.

Half Brother Details

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Author : Kenneth Oppel

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From Reader Review Half Brother for online ebook

Afton Nelson says

I chose to read this book because I've enjoyed other books by Kenneth Opper. By coincidence, I'd just heard the NPR "This American Life" podcast about Dr. and Mrs. Temrelin who "adopted" Lucy, a chimpanzee, and raised her as their own daughter--a story which did not have a happy ending. I also had recently listened to the NPR "Stuff You Should Know" podcast about How Face Transplants work and the several incidents of chimps raised in homes who suddenly turn violent and--well, the title of the podcast was "How Face Transplants work," so just I'll leave it at that.

My point is, I went into this story with a sense of foreboding and dread. I didn't see how the story could end well. And in a way, the story didn't end well. But it ended as happily as it could have. And I think the point was clearly made that the best place for wild animals is in their own habitat.

This book was not just about how animals are affected by human's quest for knowledge. It was about the relationship that developed between the chimp Zan and his half brother Ben. It was about Ben's relationship with his dad and with his mother. It was about how to treat people as well as animals. And while the story definitely painted animal testing in a negative light, it didn't seem sanctimonious.

Jenn says

In the early 1970s, Ben's parents are at the cutting edge of behavioral animal research. When Ben's father, Dr. Richard Tomlin, gets an appointment at a university that supports his proposed project for teaching American Sign Language to a chimpanzee, he moves his wife Sarah and 14 year-old son across Canada from Toronto to Victoria. Ben is not too excited about this, nor is he thrilled when his mother brings home an 8-day-old chimpanzee that Ben sees as ugly. They name the chimp Zan (after Tarzan). While Richard will be using graduate students to teach Zan ASL, Sarah will be raising Zan as a human child as she writes a dissertation on cross-fostering. Ben is expected to help with Zan's care and to see the chimpanzee as his brother. His reluctance soon wears off in the face of Zan's undeniable charm.

At first the experiments seem to go well with Zan. He masters about 65 ASL words, but there is some debate as to whether he really comprehends the language or if he is just mimicking what he sees. Ben's father tries harsh techniques while teaching Zan, including tethering him to a highchair for hours at a time. Tensions quickly arise between the father, who sees Zan as a test subject, and the son, who believes that it is his responsibility to protect his little brother. Ben struggles with the ethical and moral issues surrounding his father's research and worries about what will happen to Zan if the project fails.

Kenneth Opper's novel is incredibly well researched. He draws from real-life experiments on simian intelligence, particularly the experiments with Washoe the chimpanzee. He accurately reflects the conflicting attitudes to animal research in the 1970s. *Half-Brother* will definitely start conversations among young adult readers about the ethics of using animals. Opper's novel shows that there is not a simple solution to the problems surrounding animal test subjects. He leaves the reader to form his or her own opinions.

Half-Brother also explores the themes of family, school life and dating. Ben's tenuous relationship with Richard is fascinating and disheartening. Ben appears to be a constant disappointment to his father. Richard is cold and thoughtless to his family through much of the novel. I was just as interested in how these family dynamics would resolve as I was with what would happen to Zan. Ben's adjustment to a new school and his

desire for the daughter of his father's boss are equally interesting and believable.

Excellent writing, complex characters, and thought-provoking themes will keep readers engaged from start to finish. Like many of Oppel's novels, *Half-Brother* will appeal to a wide audience. I highly recommend this book to grades seven and up.

5inabus says

Cormac's review (aged 10)

This book is about a family who adopt a baby chimp as part of an experiment to see whether he can be taught to communicate using sign language. The mother and father are both scientists and their son, Ben, is 13 when Zan comes to live with them. This is why the book is called Half Brother, because Ben has to accept this animal not as a pet, but as a brother. At first Ben has a hard time with this but eventually he comes to his senses and realises that Zan means more to him than a science experiment.

However his Dad ends up shutting down the project - he says it's because Zan is getting too strong and dangerous but Ben knows it's because he's lost faith in the project and doesn't believe Zan is learning language or ever will. So the whole book is about one boy's fight to save his little chimp brother.

Along the way he meets many characters, some who play a key part in Zan's life, such as the Godwin family and Tim Borden and especially Peter, a student who works with Zan and becomes his best friend. This book made me feel sad sometimes, and also excited - there were some intense bits in there. I also learnt about biomedical labs and how cruel they are to animals. It's funny, sad and tragic all at the same time.

Mum's 2 cents.

Cormac laid out the plot so well there should be little for me to add. WRONG! There is in fact so much more to be said about Half Brother - that I'm actually going to need to resort to bullet points:

- First up, most importantly, it's superbly well written. I don't know exactly what it is that distinguishes YA fiction from adult fiction, because at no point did I feel that this book was beneath my reading level, yet nor did it seem to be above Cormac's either. It was simply easy and welcoming to read, like settling into a (faux, of course) fur-covered beanbag.

- The story is gripping. It achieves the perfect balance of plot/pace to studied introspection, and the ethical issues, while paramount, somehow never dominate. In fact, I happen to know that a person can read this book and not become overly bogged down by the ethical dilemmas it throws up - Cormac being a case in point. Although we discussed the thorny issues as they cropped up, I don't think Cormac, left to his own devices, would have beaten himself up about them. The dilemmas range from *what does it mean to be human?* to *should scientists maintain emotional distance from their subjects?* to *is animal testing ever justified, even if it helps to save human lives?*. Although these issues are present all the way through the book, Oppel somehow escapes the tendency to slip into overt preaching - the story speaks for itself and leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions.

- The characters are authentic. From the long-haired hippy Peter, Zan's handler, to Ben's Mum and Dad, to the prissy private school kids and eager-to-please university students. They are developed primarily through dialogue, which helps keep the narrator's voice in the background and adds to their authenticity. This is particularly the case for Ben's parents, who carry a lot of baggage in their relationship (that is to say, as much

as anyone else!) leaving Ben to sift through the left-overs and make sense of his own place in the family. And all throughout there are alliances and trade-offs, politics, pride and finances at stake, ensuring the reader is well invested in Zan's future by the final few pages.

- Authenticity of the period. This book is like the literary equivalent of Mad Men. Set in the 1970s, kids ride bikes and shoot BB guns, they're "necking" at discos, listening to Abba and washing dishes by hand, they consider colour tv's and digital clocks the height of technology, and experiments involving chimps are all the rage. The attention to detail is subtle but fantastic.

- The surprises. And there are a few - one or two outrageous scenes in particular left us laughing/gawping in a mixture of horror/hilarity. These scenes passed as briefly as they appeared with no explanation or comment, and I loved that. It reminded us, just as any good fiction should, that *anything* can happen.

- It made me cry - and in case you didn't know, it's hard to read out loud through tears.

I was worried Zan was getting upset, so I talked to him as I groomed him. I started telling him the story of his day, and flying on an aeroplane, but he wouldn't remember any of that, and anyway, it was such a sad story I couldn't keep going.

But if I had to dispense with all the bullet points, what would I say about Half Brother? I'd say it's going to be a hard act to follow.

* Should also note that this book is likely based on true events (must look into it, no info is given in the book) - a movie I saw last year, Project Nim follows a very similar trajectory to that of Project Zan. Interestingly, I wanted to take the kids to see that film but it was rated R15 which I couldn't quite understand, being as it was a documentary. It wasn't until afterwards that I appreciated why... Boy, the 70s were a weird time.... <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1814836/>

Brian says

In Oppel's latest novel, a boy is raised by two parents who are scientists. They decide to adopt a baby chimp (kidnap) and teach it to speak English. But his father isn't as nice as he seems.. Is he using the chimp for more sinister purposes? Can the main character accept the chimp as a real member of his family? This book has some teen drama sprinkled into the fold. It was a fairly quick, but emotional read and I really enjoyed the interactions with the chimp, Zan.

Nicole says

I would read this book over Sara Gruen's "The Ape House" Any day of the week. Unlike Gruen's book, which claims to glean inspiration from notable great ape ASL research experiments, namely, Project Washoe, Project Nim, Koko the gorilla, and Kanzi, this book actually reflects many of the situations encountered while these projects were active. Many parallels are drawn between Zan and Washoe (Roger Fouts' "Next of Kin: My Conversations With Chimpanzees"), including the plan behind the cross-fostering, and utilizing guidance to teach ASL signs. There is also a change of housing to a chimp facility run

by a researcher who makes use of collars, chains, cages, and cattle prods, and Peter, who plays the role of Dr. Fouts, Washoe's friend, guardian, and protector. There are also stark similarities to Project Nim: the fact that both Nim and Zan had a confusing, revolving-door system of caregivers and ASL teachers, and that his learning was not quantified with double-blind tests, which virtually invalidated everything he had been taught. It's a well-researched book, and reads more like an actual account of a legitimate research attempt, rather than just clichéd, dramatic fiction (i.e. "The Ape House").

The only distracting issue I found was with Ben, the family's 13-year old son. His instinctual behavior is consistent with that of a 13-year old, as with his thought processes. However, his actions and reasonings are more indicative of an older teenager. He doesn't act like a 13-year old, nor does he reason like one. However, he thinks and behaves like one. It's a tricky differentiation to try to explain, but I'm sure if you read the book, you'll know what I mean. And I think he picked up on the "alpha-male" stuff too readily and easily. Some cross-fostering experiments did result in family's children assimilating chimpanzee behaviors, but this kid soaks them up too readily from only one well-behaved chimpanzee who only interacted with human. He'd need to spend quite a bit of time interacting among several chimpanzees before he began to pick up on the controlling pushiness of a dominant animal.

But those details are just splitting hairs. Overall, it's a good, easy read, and it quite entertaining if you've read any of the books on other ape cross-fostering experiments of the '60s and '70s.

Hailey says

So this book wasn't my favorite but I still really liked it. I liked how the mom surprised Ben with a chimp and at first he hated the chimp but as the book went on and as been got to know Zan (the chimp). Ben's mom and dad were scientists and they were doing an experiment about how chimps can learn sign language. Ben started getting closer to Zan and they hired one of the dad's students who also came really close to Ben and Zan, but then the experiment fell through and they had to give up Zan to a man named Hellison. Hellison was going to sell Zan to a lab so they could do experiments on him that could kill him so Ben and his mom stole him from Hellison, but they couldn't keep him, so Ben and Zan ran away, then Zan saved Ben's, they came home and gave him to a place that Zan was really happy to be....

Sarah says

Ben's parents are both scientists but he is shocked when they announce that they are adopting a chimpanzee so they can try to teach it sign language. He isn't keen on the idea and really doesn't want to have to move across the country to be nearer the university that is funding the experiment either. When Zan arrives Ben is told to think of him as a younger brother, Zan is to be raised as a human child and the whole family must be involved along with several students from the university. But what will happen to Zan if funding for the experiment runs out?

I have to confess that I was nervous about reading Half Brother, the idea of raising a chimp in a human family didn't sit right with me and I wasn't sure if this was a story I would enjoy. There were a couple of things at the beginning of the book that made me really uncomfortable and I almost didn't continue reading but I have to say I'm glad I pushed through and gave the story a chance. Both Ben and Zan stole my heart and this ended up being an incredibly emotional read that I thoroughly enjoyed.

When Ben first finds out that his parents will be bringing home a chimp and raising him as Ben's brother he

isn't happy. He doesn't like the idea of having to move to another part of the country and is worried about what his new classmates will think of him and his family. When Zan first arrives he is determined to have as little to do with him as possible but it doesn't take long before Zan's big brown eyes and sweet nature start to grow on him. He soon falls in love with his new brother and becomes very protective of him. I loved watching the relationship develop between the two of them and found it sweet watching them together. Watching Zan's progress as he grows older and starts learning sign language is fascinating, especially when you find out that the story is based on two real experiments with chimps that were carried out in the 70's. Some of the things you will learn about animal experiments that have been held in the name of science are truly horrific. I know humans are capable of some despicable acts but there is something that makes it even worse when it is against defenseless animals and done supposedly for the greater good of mankind.

Ben's father insisted on treating Zan like a member of the family and raising him so he thinks of himself as human but as a scientist he has always managed to keep emotions out of the equation. This isn't so easy for Ben to do so when the experiment starts getting bad press and the money starts to run out Ben is worried about what will happen to Zan in the future. This was where the story became completely heartbreaking. It's hard to go into much detail without giving spoilers though so you'll have to read the book to find out what happens and how things turn out for both Zan and Ben.

Alongside Zan's story we also get to watch as Ben starts his new school and tries to fit in and make friends, this part is very much a coming of age story. I found it interesting to see that as much as Zan was learning to become human Ben was picking up qualities that chimpanzees have in the wild as he tried to become the alpha male at school. I did find 'Project Jennifer' - where Ben approaches trying to win Jennifer's heart as some kind of experiment - was a little odd but I think considering his background this was probably quite a natural way for Ben to look at things.

Half Brother is a book that raises all kinds of issues regarding testing on animals and animal cruelty but it never forces opinions down your throat, instead it gives you all sides of the story and allows you to make up your own mind. It will also make you think about love, family and the rights of those who aren't able to stand up for themselves. A thought provoking and powerful read that will take you through all kinds of emotions Half Brother is a book I'd thoroughly recommend, I guarantee you will fall in love with Zan. This is the first book I've read by Kenneth Opiel but it definitely won't be the last.

Ben Babcock says

Our capacity for language is one of the attributes often cited as what makes humans so distinct from other animals. It's a controversial distinction, because we've observed other species communicate in very interesting and effective ways: whales sing, dolphins whistle, birds do whatever it is they do to switch places while in formation. Parrots, of course, can be trained to mimic human speech! But there's a difference between replicating instinctual sounds with fixed meanings and being able to learn language—to use it in innovative ways. When we look to other species who might possess this capability, we naturally turn to one of our closest relatives: chimpanzees.

There are many famous cases of attempts to teach primates signs or some other type of “language”: Koko, Washoe, Nim. The last has received recent publicity in the form of a documentary, *Project Nim*, and Washoe and Nim quite resemble Zan, the fictional cross-fostered chimp in *Half Brother*. Although it seems evident that Kenneth Opiel researched these projects, and others like them, for this book, it would have been interesting to hear how they inspired him in his own words. I guess afterwords or author's notes aren't all that common in young adult fiction (but maybe they should be).

I'm reading this book because my associate teacher in my second practicum is reading it to her Grade 8 class. I picked it up the week before my practicum, because it seemed like the thing to do. Opper has been around since I was a kid—I'm pretty sure I read at least *Silverwing*—but I never quite became a “fan” of him. I skipped a huge chunk of YA fiction when I was that age as I jumped right up to more sophisticated stories—mysteries and then, in Grades 7 and 8, fantasy and science fiction. Now, as I prepare to teach those grades, I'm making a conscious effort to look out for interesting young adult fiction. Not only will it help me understand the mindset of my charges, but it will give me some practical recommendations if my students ever ask me what to read.

I ended up enjoying *Half Brother* a lot more than I expected—though why that's so is beyond me, because I really like chimpanzees. If there's one thing I love about David Brin's *Uplift* series, it's the possibility of letting chimps talk. Sure, they're sexually rapacious and somewhat brutal ... but they're also so fascinating. Look into those deep eyes and see how much they perceive, how much they understand, how much they can empathize ... I don't know if words like *sentient* or *sapient* are accurate, but there's *something* going on there. Of course, experiments trying to narrow that something down inevitable run into ethical issues.

Ethics plays a role in *Half Brother*, as does a slew of other motifs. This is a very rich novel in terms of potential for discussion with a class. One can discuss the ethics of animal testing: should we experiment on chimps? What about medical testing on animals? Cosmetics testing? Where do we draw the lines? And then we can go deeper: the protagonist, Ben, repeatedly comments that Zan isn't human, but he is a *person*. So that raises the question of what *personhood* is, if not humanity. What does it mean to be a person? Fifty or sixty years ago, we were having those discussions about people who weren't white. A century ago we were having them about people who weren't male. Now we're having them about people who aren't necessarily our own species. The times, they change, but the conversations stay the same.

Then there's Ben. The fact that he shares my name certainly helps. As the book opens he is about start Grade 8, and he finishes Grade 9 before the book's end. For the most part, Opper does an excellent job portraying Ben as a genuine 13-year-old boy. The vocabulary and syntax are accurate, and the ways Ben conceptualizes and explains events reflect the thinking of someone just on that cusp of adolescence. And he has a crush! Opper sets up parallels between Ben's interactions with Zan (Project Zan) and his attempts to get closer to Jennifer Godwin (Project Jennifer). It's cute and adorable, and I'm sure that actual Grade 8s in my class find it icky and weird. (Occasionally, Opper stretches the credibility of what he has Ben write—I doubt a 13-year-old boy would describe his crush as “luscious”.) I'm kind of interested to see what the girls think of how Ben is acting!

One curious note: this book seems to be set sometime before 1977. According to Wikipedia, this is when Canada switched its speed limit signs to kilometres per hour—early in the book Ben mentions a sign in miles per hour, which really jumped out at me. Aside from that incident and the frequent mention of records and record stores (at first I just thought these kids were all unspeakably retro), Opper never makes it obvious that this book is set in the near past; there are few enough indications of the timeline. To be honest, I'm not sure *why* he chose this. I have some guesses. Perhaps he wanted to be closer to the era when the real chimp language experiments were running. Perhaps he needed an environment where a teenager wouldn't have access to the Internet or to a cell phone. I'm not sure.

For a book with a such a simple and, yeah, predictable narrative, there's quite a bit going on in terms of story. Ben gets to know Zan and starts thinking about the ethics of what his father is doing. This leads to issues with his dad, particularly when the project begins foundering and his dad makes a number of questionable decisions related to Zan's wellbeing and future. Moreover, Ben has trouble getting the marks necessary to satisfy his father, who feels Ben merely needs to try harder. Opper is careful to portray Ben as a kid who does try hard (mostly) but happens not to be so hot at academics. He struggles even more as he attempts to find his social position at a new, private school. All of these sub-plots are detailed and fine-tuned in such a way that they're ripe for discussion, but they never subsume the main story about a boy and his

chimpanzee.

I admit, I teared up at the ending. It's somewhat contrived, but that doesn't reduce its power. Opiel gives us a send-off carefully calibrated to be bittersweet, "happy" in some ways but also heartbreaking in others. *Half Brother* doesn't take half measures in this regard: everything is either an emotional high or an emotional low, and while it can feel exhausting at times, I also think it keeps the book interesting. There's a volatility to the story that probably works well to hold the attention of a younger audience. At the same time, as I describe above, Opiel does not condescend to his audience *at all*. The issues are real and important, and the language he uses is authentic. In a world where certain popular young adult fiction has protagonists who do nothing but swoon over competing mythological boyfriends and faint during all the interesting scenes (I name no names), I'm happy there are far superior alternatives.

P.M. says

I do not like chimpanzees or monkeys of any stripe. I always skipped that part of a zoo when visiting. Having said that, I loved this book about 13 - 15 year old Ben Tomlin whose parents have brought an infant chimp, Zan, into the family to study cross-fostering and language acquisition. Ben is a typical self-absorbed teenager at the beginning of the book, a typical boy who resents his parents making him move from Toronto to British Columbia. He even resents the chimp who will become their sole focus for as long as the study lasts. Soon, without any effort on his part, Zan infiltrates Ben's heart and becomes his beloved little brother. When a linguistic expert says that Zan is not really learning language despite his command of 65 ASL words, Dad's university sells him to Dr. Helson, who runs a chimp ranch. Ben is devastated because he is positive that Zan is using language. The last thing he said to Ben was "Open food box" because he was hungry. No one has taught him the word for refrigerator so Zan invented his own word. This breakthrough is ignored and Zan is sold. Dr. Helson is very strict with his chimps; Zan is not allowed to have his favorite blanket or his G.I. Joe toy. Ben realizes that it is up to him to save Zan no matter what it takes. Ben was such a wonderful character; he went from typical narcissistic teen to altruistic teen who realizes that if you love someone you must set them free. Zan was also a wonderful character with a real sense of humor and a real devotion to Ben. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to explore what makes a person and what makes a family.

Alan says

Drawing liberally on real-life research into simian intelligence and language acquisition, this fictionalized take on Washoe the chimpanzee's life may be targeted at adolescent readers, perhaps, but it's a quick and enjoyable read for anyone who, say, likes Robert Sawyer but wants something lighter. I finished it in a single day, though it took me awhile longer to decide what to say about it.

The book as it stands has at least one significant flaw: I searched in vain for any foreword, afterword, bibliographic reference or even dust jacket footnote acknowledging the source for so much of the narrative, or pointing interested readers to further information. Kenneth Opiel himself is quite open about the origins of this story, so I think it must just have been a missed opportunity on Scholastic Press's part (at least for this edition; other editions may have corrected this issue). Any way you look at it, though, it's a real shame that *Half Brother* could not give its audience more of a clue about its story's historical basis.

Ben Tomlin is our 13-year-old narrator for *Half Brother*. Ben's father Richard is a Canadian behavioral psychologist, an aloof and intensely dedicated scientist (possibly fairly far along on the spectrum of autistic behavior himself), who takes his family from Toronto to Victoria, British Columbia, in order to pursue grant money for his grand project: adopting a chimpanzee—here called Zan—and raising it in a human environment, to see whether it can learn American Sign Language (ASL).

Ben's a good choice for a viewpoint character, even if this book were not targeted specifically to kids his age. His inexperience explains, for example, why the book starts out with no hint of reflection about the ethics of proving simian intelligence by abducting a baby chimp from its mother to raise it with a human family.

Ethical considerations definitely come in later, though, as Zan's integration into the Tomlin family proceeds and the project attracts various kinds of media attention. Ben falls for the little guy pretty quickly, and soon comes to consider him as a full-fledged family member. His mother, a researcher in her own right, also finds Zan easy to treat in motherly ways. Dr. Richard Tomlin, though, never seems to see Zan as anything but an experimental subject. This conflict provides much of the tension, especially when a couple of setbacks lead to the project being cancelled altogether. How the Tomlins deal with the loss of Zan to a rather more old-fashioned animal center in Nevada drives the rest of the novel.

I first thought that *Half Brother* had a whiff of the "trunk novel" about it... Ben has phonograph records and a photographic darkroom, but no cellphone and no computer, for example, and his mother is a 34-year-old who dresses in bell bottoms and Native American jewelry. That's just because the novel is set explicitly in 1973, though, as becomes clear later on. As Opper mentions in the above-linked talk about the book, he didn't start writing it until after Washoe's death in 2007.

The bottom line on this one: it's probably not going to have the impact that Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* did back in 1975, but then it's not intended for the same audience. I think *Half Brother* is a good conversation-starter about animal research for younger readers—as long as you keep some supplemental material on-hand to flesh it out.

Melody says

I had this book out from the library for months before I could bring myself to crack it open. It seemed so fraught with peril, and I was afraid of it.

It's the story of a young man, the son of scientists, who gets inextricably involved with his parents' experiment around teaching a baby chimp ASL while raising him as a human, or as near enough to a human as to make no difference. It's also the story of a young man falling in love for the first time, and adjusting to school, and dealing with a welter of confusing feelings.

Solidly written, emotionally affecting, and not terribly wrenching. There's no happy ending coming, one can see this from the beginning. The journey is very worth taking, and I think this is a wonderful book for young adults who may not have thought through animals in labs and what can and does happen to them sometimes.

Set at a fairly comfortable (and believable) remove in the early 70s, it's a gripping, well-plotted tale. Some of the characters are pretty black and white, but overall it's nicely done.

Lily Koh says

This book is about a boy named Ben who is a son of a scientist. His dad tries to do an experiment where chimps communicate with humans. He thinks of doing this by teaching a chimp ASL. Ben at first wasn't happy when his mom brought a chimp. But later on he started to love the chimp no matter what and think of him as a younger brother. But, there was a problem in between and they had to give the chimp away. He visited from time to time but noticed that the manager tried to sell the chimp. They stole the chimp away and went back to their home. Soon the manager asked for the chimp when he noticed the chimp was gone. Dad said he would pay for the chimp. They had to get a lot of money in only a few days so they started to do fundraising so that they could get the chimp back. Will they be able to get their chimp back? Read the book to find out.

Raina says

Great historical fiction with a local angle (Victoria is a great weekend destination for my area), and a cool scientific/animal hook.

Booktalked this as part of my 2016 middle school sweep and it was a runaway hit.

This was an example of a book where I rewrote my booktalk to great success.

My first version focused on the "double-edged sword"ness of the similarities between humans and chimpanzees. My second booktalk took a scene from the book of Zan being adorable and brought it to life. Complete with a bottle of liquid soap.

Pretty hefty, but still successful, this took me a few years to get to it, but I'm glad I did. Kenneth Oppel is one of those authors I have to resist reading... he's so good!

Kellee says

Ben is introduced to Zan when he is 8 days old. Zan is his new baby brother. At first Ben is resistant to loving Zan, but that changes as he gets to know him. Ben loves Zan more than anything in the world. He would do anything for him. But others, including his father, don't understand why he has such an attachment to Zan. Yes, Zan is his brother, but Zan is also a chimp. A chimp who Ben's father is researching by conducting an experiment to see if chimps can learn language. To Ben, Zan has become a member of the family, but to others, he is just a specimen.

Ever since I started teaching and I was introduced to Willie B. through a short story and Sukari in *Hurt Go Happy*, I have gotten a mild obsession with apes- specifically chimps, gorillas and orangutans. I have often visited the Center for Great Apes where I learned even more about the life of chimps in entertainment, testing and living with humans.

Also, in the last couple of years, I have been introduced to Kenneth Oppel through his other books- Matt Cruse series, *Victor Frankenstein* and *Silverwing*- and I have adored every word of his that I have read/listened to.

So, when *Half Brother* came out, I knew it was a book I had to read. But then it got pushed aside again and again. For some reason, I just never got around to it. Until my best friend listened to it and insisted it be the

next audiobook I read- and I am so glad she did! Half Brother is such a touching, suspenseful, well-done, amazing story. It pulls at your heart strings throughout and makes you think about all that it means to be human.

Kenneth Oppel obviously did a lot of research for this project. Half Brother is set in the 1970s at the peak of chimp research including research for the space program, medicine and language acquisition (Project Nim & Project Washoe) and also the beginning of protest against such experiments. This book teaches you the history of this time through a fictional experiment that is not much different than the real ones.

Half Brother is an emotion-filled, thought-provoking book which brings Zan and his family to life in 1973. This book is made to be a discussion as it introduces so many tough topics and is one that I cannot wait to discuss with students.

Reviewed posted at: <http://www.teachmentortexts.com/2012/...>

Brynn says

All right, let it be known that I am an enormous, gigantic, honking big fan of Kenneth Oppel. This Dark Endeavour and Airborn are my two favourite books, ever- books I read through fairly often for little to no reason, and books I occasionally sleep with like normal people might sleep with a teddy bear. Ridiculous perhaps? No, because it's true.

Anyways. To the point now. I didn't actually like this one. Usually Oppel's books are very engaging and interesting, but this one, I felt, never went anywhere. Sure, they captured the monkey at the end. I don't care! Our hero (I actually forgot his name- see how much I liked it?) is somewhat jerkish and annoying. He's not as fun as other Oppel protagonists, and seems doomed to be forgettable. Why? Well, I don't even know his name.

It started out decently enough and I could see some potential, but I never became very interested. Also towards the last third it started picking up bizarre similarities to the latest Planet of the Apes movie, but that's another story. I kept waiting for the main character to do something cool and funny and win me over. And frankly I never liked the monkey.

For my usual standards, Half Brother is fairly good. But I'm so used to Kenneth Oppel writing amazing books that I was left disappointed by how not-amazing it was. In Airborn there were large angry cats with wings- in this book, there's an annoying little chimpanzee and another annoying little chimpanzee whose name is (I just checked the back of the book) Ben.

Come on, Oppel. You've done better. This one really needed a monster fish living in a cave that eats people, or something. The one thing I did like was the time period- the 70s are interesting and that kept me more attentive than I would've been.

Looking forward to the next Frankenstein book, which I hope has no monkeys. No monkeys, please. Thanks.
