

Second Reaction: A Prank Gone Too Far

Fletcher, Ralph. *Also Known as Rowan Pahi*. New York: Clarion Books, 2011.

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In *Also Known as Rowan Pahi*, Bobby Steele shares the same name as his father. The name became locally infamous when the elder Bobby Steele snapped under financial stress and assaulted his wife with a hot clothes iron, leaving a permanent burn mark. Bobby lives with his father and younger brother Cody; their mother leaves after Bobby's father is released from jail. These issues were discussed with two young teens as we examined how *Also Known as Rowan Pahi* is a story about identity and how one is attached to it.

Bobby, Marcus and Big Poobs will be sophomores at Riverview public high school at the end of the summer, and they frequent the local International House of Pancakes (IHOP). At the IHOP, they often observe students from the affluent Whitestone Prep School whom they call Stoneys. One day, the Stoneys depart the IHOP, leaving a blank Whitestone Prep application behind on their table which finds its way into the hands of Bobby and his friends. They decide to fill out the application, creating a fictitious applicant. They intend to mock the standards of Whitestone Prep by creating an applicant with an identity based on their standards. The name chosen is Rowan Ian Pahi, deriving the surname by reversing the spelling of their hangout. The teen readers participated in a discussion regarding the ethical implications of falsely filling out applications. While filling out applications or

magazine subscription forms is not uncommon for adolescent entertainment, they know not to submit them.

When Rowan Ian Pohi gets accepted to Whitestone Prep, Bobby and his friends congratulate themselves and give the acceptance letter a burial to put their fictional applicant to rest. Before the weekend is over, however, Bobby impulsively recovers the acceptance letter while out running. His mother once said he must have been born on Opposite Day due to his impulsiveness and tendency to do the opposite of what he had originally stated. The teen readers now were asked to consider if Rowan Pohi was born on an Opposite Day since Pohi is written in the opposite order of IHOP. Bobby's impulsiveness was inspired by his wish to lead a life opposite to that of his own.

Rowan Pohi's experience at Whitestone Prep draws him deeper into his deception. Ralph Fletcher frequently alludes to the 25 million dollar planetarium at the school, thus establishing it as the domain of the affluent and privileged and showing that Rowan is impressed by the facilities as well as the academic standards and low student to teacher ratio. Rowan is also a different type of person than Bobby. Female students are drawn to him for seemingly no apparent reason, so much so that he starts to have difficulty balancing relationships. The first few days at Whitestone Prep are the substance of fairy tales, until he encounters students who know his true identity due to his father's assault of his mother. The teen readers compared and contrasted Bobby Steele versus Rowan Pohi and considered what internal identity conflicts Bobby must address in order to present himself as Rowan.

In Fletcher's novel, the students who knew Bobby Steele try to extort money from him in exchange for keeping the secret of his true identity. Bobby refuses to submit, and his true identity is revealed to the Whitestone Prep administration, forcing Bobby to face a hearing by the disciplinary committee to determine his fate at Whitestone Prep. The teen readers addressed two topics in our discussion, including dealing with bullying and what would be an appropriate outcome for Bobby from the hearing.

The young teen readers discussed how this story is unrealistic. Bobby was able to perpetrate a false identity, thus compromising his academic honesty with minimal negative consequences. I believe that *Also Known as Rowan Pohi* does not appropriately address issues concerning the consequences of compromising one's integrity and honesty. The story will probably appeal to young male readers due to the predominance of male characters, but no positive role models can be identified.

About the Author

Valerie McEnany is a graduate student in Education & Curriculum Instruction at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana who likes to share her enthusiasm for books with young adults.