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Ten-year-old Gabe has just been accepted to the Summer Center for Gifted Enrichment. That means he'll be spending six weeks at sleepaway camp, writing poetry and perfecting logic proofs. SCGE has been a summer home of some legendary middle-school smarty-pants (and future *Jeopardy!* contestants), but it also has a reputation for being, well, a nerd camp. Gabe isn't a nerd. Is he? He's never thought about it much, but compared to Zack, his hip, soon-to-be-stepbrother from LA, Gabe's not so sure where he falls on the cool scale. A wild summer at camp—complete with a midnight canoe ride to Dead Man's Island—helps Gabe realize that he and Zack may be different, but that doesn't mean they can't be brothers...and friends.

## Nerd Camp Details

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# From Reader Review Nerd Camp for online ebook

## Kate says

Gabe is excited to go to a summer camp for smart kids, but then he meets his new stepbrother Zack. Zack thinks sleepaway camp is so cool - but makes fun of some kids he knows who are going to "nerd camp." Gabe decides to write letters to Zack telling him only the cool things that happen at camp. And he also decides to make a logic proof to show that he is not a nerd by listing the fun, cool activities he does and the nerdy activities. As the summer goes on, Gabe has a great time at camp, and begins to realize that his nerdy fun might not be totally separate from his cool fun. Now he just has to figure out how to tell Zack.

This was a fun story, the kind that makes me wish I'd ever gone to sleepaway camp (although every time the characters called it that, I thought of the horror movie "Sleepaway Camp" and its SHOCKING ENDING!). Gabe flourishes when surrounded by other nerdy kids, and really throws himself into activities like poetry and making algorithms without any thought of how Zack might think of it, until he sits down to write his letters. I like that Gabe keeps true to himself but is also willing to try new things out of his comfort zone (at one point, Gabe chooses to do a hairstyling activity even though he's the only boy - mostly to escape one annoying girl, but still).

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## Beth G. says

*Problem: Am I a nerd who only has nerdy adventures?*

*Hypothesis: No.*

Ten-year-old Gabe is finally getting what he always wanted: a brother. His soon-to-be-stepmother has a son, Zack, who is his age. Gabe is sure that he and Zack will be best friends, but their first meeting is less than promising. Gabe quickly realizes that all the things he likes - math team, reading, museums and libraries - Zack sees as "nerdy". The only thing about Gabe that seems to impress Zack is that Gabe is about to go to sleep-away camp for the summer. What Zack doesn't know is that the camp is the Summer Center for Gifted Enrichment, a gathering of nerdy kids from across the country. Over the course of the summer, in between kayak trips and Color War, logic proofs and poetry writing, Gabe keeps a list of his adventures as evidence for whether or not he really is just a nerd, or if he might be something more.

With an eye for quirky detail, Weissman develops Gabe as a sensitive, hyperintelligent 10-year-old boy. In the first chapter, Gabe recalls staying up on New Year's Eve with his math team friends, when they calculated the number of seconds from 8:00 p.m. to midnight. He then thinks about calculating the number of seconds until his train in the morning, but he decides that it will just make him too excited to sleep. From his love of math to his cluelessness about girls, we hear Gabe's perspective on everything. It's a slyly funny narrative, with humor that even clever Gabe probably won't pick on until he's a little older. This is a fabulous contemporary realistic middle grade novel filled with humor and adventure, a great combination. A kid doesn't have to think he might be a nerd to enjoy this book, although he might finish it thinking that such a thing might not be so bad.

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## **Elissa Weissman says**

Coming summer 2011! Get ready to geek out.

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## **Erin says**

Very nerdy for sure...I love the idea of showing some nerd love!.....but I felt rushed at the end, and that the brothers "sudden" true connection was a bit fake. Just ok to me...not enough deep drama or emotion, and although he's 10, I felt a lot of the dialogue and thinking felt very immature and "written by an adult in a kid voice".

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## **Jonathan H. says**

Nerd Camp is based on the Johns Hopkins' Center for Talented Youth, but anyone who has been to an academics-based summer camp will recognize the setting. Gabe is a 10-year-old nerd who is really excited about going to the Summer Center for Gifted Enrichment for the first time, where he'll get to take classes in poetry and logical reasoning along with traditional summer camp activities like kayaking and swimming. But then he meets his soon-to-be stepbrother, Zack, a kid who is ultracool and makes fun of nerds. Gabe is caught between his love of learning and his desire to impress Zack.

It's a very fun story with delightful characters, but ultimately it's about embracing who you are and not worrying about what others think. In this day and age you'd think that we wouldn't need books like this any more, but with incidents like Star Wars Katie getting teased for her taste in pop culture, apparently it's a lesson that kids still need to learn. Though there are parts of the book that apply to non-nerds (like Zack), I'd say the target audience is still kids with a love of learning, particularly those who are starting to feel the pressure of being "cool."

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## **LauraW says**

I would actually give this 3 1/2 stars, if that were allowed, but I am rounding up, due to this being about nerds. The book is a fairly standard tween type book, with one kid wondering if his nerdiness will keep his new stepbrother from liking him, but at the same time really enjoying his nerdy summer camp. The nerdiness questions get a little old after a while, but I think they have to be there.

As an interesting aside: this is one of the few American books I have read, where relationships to family and other adults are portrayed really positively. I give it a plus for that, even though, at times, the positive feelings border on sugary. In fact, there is a bit of the too-positive throughout the whole book - another reason for the 3 1/2 stars.

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## **Kathleen Houlihan says**

Thanks to my buddy, Ann, who suggested this awesome book to me!

This is the story of ten-year-old Gabe. He's super smart -- so smart that he was just accepted to a special summer camp for smart kids -- and he's such an infectiously thoughtful and enthusiastic character, that you can't help but love him from page one.

When Gabe finds out his dad is getting remarried, and he'll have a stepbrother, he's overjoyed and plans out everything he wants to share with his new bro on their first meeting. When they finally meet, Gabe is a little stunned to discover that his brother-to-be is not a nerd like him, but instead is a super cool boy with gelled hair and his own cell phone. Gabe, not wanting to risk a chance at friendship with his new brother, tries to play it cool, hiding his nerdiness as much as he can.

Leaving for camp is a great opportunity for him to figure out how to solve his problem. He even creates a logic proof to test the theory that he might be a nerd who only has nerdy adventures.

I don't want to give too much of the story away because it's such a great journey, and you get to follow thoughtful Gabe on his summer adventure at Nerd Camp while he learns some great things about himself, about his new brother, and about being a nerd.

It's not a saccharine sweet tale, there's some nicely nuanced handling of kids coping with peer criticism, and the vehicle for the resolution is unexpected but satisfying (even if it does strain credulity a bit to make it happen so quickly -- your readers won't care, I certainly didn't!).

Great for boys and girls around the age of ten, especially those who might need some help gaining perspective on how awesome nerdiness can really be.

And now, I really wish I'd gone to Nerd Camp as a kid!

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### **AMY says**

Gabe is a boy dealing with a divorced family and wants his mom to have a baby so he will have a new brother. He gets his wish sort of when he finds out his dad's girlfriend has a son, his new sort of brother, named Zack. He finally meets Zack and does everything he can to get Zack to think he is cool, like agreeing with everything he likes or says. Gabe gets selected for summer camp for math nerds/gifted and is afraid his new brother won't approve. This is a such a BORING book! Who picked this??? I read 7 chapters/46 pgs ZZZ! This is a MS level book and BORING! Not recommended. I never could figure out how old he was supposed to be...but I really feel this is MS material.

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### **Susan Dove Lempke says**

I put off reading this one till past review deadline time, but turned out to enjoy it quite a lot. The author really knows what makes gifted kids tick, and so it was filled with lots of funny little details, along with a believable main character and a plot that moves along quickly. I wish I didn't think kids will only read it if they consider themselves nerds because it has something to say to the non-nerds out there too. It even has a nice little jab at kids who go to the library that would make a nice hook for booktalking.

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**Bella Juozapaitis says**

I was obsessed with reading this book. I once read 200 pages in one sitting. My favorite part is when Gabe and Amanda bond during the kayak to Dead Mans Island.

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**Sharon says**

This caught my eye at the library for my nine-year-old son. He read it quickly, then I read it quickly. It was a fun, engaging story about a boy who is excited to go to an academic summer camp, but is worried that his new stepbrother will think him supremely uncool. It was a great book and not preachy.

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**Kate says**

Really cute and self-affirming. I wish I had gone to Nerd Camp...

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**Bijan Rosalia says**

This book holds a special place in my heart because my dad used to read this book to me and my little brother before we went to sleep. We both loved this story!

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**Robert Kent says**

Nerd Camp is a hilarious read and it even features a cameo from Alex Tribeck! It's a fun story that young nerds and old nerds alike can relate to. Pack your bags and head to Nerd Camp this summer!

--Robert Kent, Middle Grade Ninja

Sorry about that, Esteemed Reader. I was just thinking ahead to when the anniversary edition of Nerd Camp is released and naturally, I assume Antheum Books for Young Readers will insist it include a blurb from yours truly on the cover. I'm just trying to make it easy for them:)

But even if the copy you get your hands on does not feature my blurb (for shame), you should go ahead and buy it anyway. Wiessman has crafted a fine middle grade novel worth reading and studying.

So here's the deal: Gabe's dad is getting married and he's getting a new half brother, Zack. An only child, Gabe has always longed for a brother. He can't wait to meet Zack and you just know they're going to be best friends. Brothers don't shake hands. Brothers gotta hug! Everything is going perfect until Zack drops this bombshell: "Gabe, I'm really your mother reincarnated." Wait no, that's a dream I had:) Here's the actual bombshell:

“...You can’t be on a math team and be cool. Math team, gifted program, hanging out and reading—all those things automatically make you a geek... Get this. This kid in my class, he’s such a nerd that he wants to keep going to school over the summer. So he’s going to this special nerd camp. That must be the most boringest place in the world.”

What’s nerdy about reading? The problem is that Gabe himself is a nerd! And he’s going to Nerd Camp TM! And his mother is not dead! Actually, she’s just divorced from his father and good on them because they get along as partial friends. She congratulates him on his pending nuptials and they appear to have put whatever differences they have aside to focus on being Gabe’s parents. Good on Weissman for showing their relationship as nothing out of the ordinary, enforcing the notion that divorced couples with children should behave this way.

Nerd Camp is not actually about Zack and Gabe. It’s about Gabe going to camp, the fellow nerds he meets there, the adventures they have, and even a summer romance (middle grade style). That’s why it’s called Nerd Camp and not My New Half Brother (Who Used to be My Mother). From page 38 to 236, Weissman’s focus is logic problems and karaoke and other painfully nerdy things that made the ninja remember his own misspent nerdy youth.

So my question to you is why doesn’t Weissman start the book with Gabe’s arrival at Nerd Camp? Isn’t everything else just needless exposition slowing down the main story? True, the passages of Gabe, who is among the nerdiest nerds who ever nerded, attempting to hide his true self from Zack are among the funniest in the novel. But we’re talking about 63 pages in a 257 page book, or to put that in nerd terms, 24.51%, nearly one fourth of the Nerd Camp book is less about Nerd Camp and more about Zack and Gabe. Funny or not, unless there’s a point, these pages need to be cut.

But there is a point, or I wouldn’t have brought it up. Let us imagine you and I sat down to write a book about Nerd Camp, not that we’re going to do it now that Weissman beat us to it:) But if we did, we’d start with the big picture: our hero, let’s call him, oh, I don’t know, Gabe, is a nerd looking forward to Nerd Camp. He’s going to have a great time singing and learning and he might just have something going with that Amanda chick. It’s a decent start, but we’re going to need some conflict. Let’s see... there’s competitions, so Gabe will be in conflict with other campers, and we could make Amanda a force of antagonism for at least part of the story.

Editor: Good, good. But what’s this story about?

Us: Nerd Camp.

Editor: Yes, I know, but what about Nerd Camp?

Us: It’s awesome.

Editor: Let me put this another way: how is Gabe different at the end of the novel than he is at the beginning.

Us: He’s been to Nerd Camp. Duh.

Editor: No, no. There must be a conflict that makes Gabe universally identifiable and makes the novel an accessible read even to non-nerds.

Us: Oh. Well, he could always worry about whether or not he’s accepted socially and learn not to worry so much about what others think.

Editor: Brilliant! That’s a staple of MG/YA literature. Who hasn’t felt like a nerd and been led to question themselves? I’m going to publish your book and one day it will be reviewed by the Middle Grade Ninja!

Us: All our dreams just came true! I hope the ninja remembers to write his review with a separate blurb we can put on the cover of the anniversary edition.

And there we have it. But how to demonstrate Gabe’s internal struggle with nerdiness? By giving him an

external conflict that highlights and contributes to his internal conflict, of course. There are any number of ways to do this. My preference would be with zombies and/or sharks, but for the sake of brevity, let's look at how Weissman did it. She's given Gabe a half brother worth taking up one fourth of her novel for.

Gabe's fear about Zack finding out he's a nerd isn't about Zack. Who cares what Zack thinks? He's only in one fourth of the book:) Gabe's real issue is he thinks he's a nerd (he's right) and he disapproves. Ah so, Grasshopper. Don't get me wrong, Zack's a fine character and written believably, but the point of his being included in this tale of Nerd Camp is so Gabe can have this moment:

The Gabe part of Gabe wanted to agree, but ever since the night of his karaoke routine, he was starting to look at things the way Zack might look at them. And reading was definitely not cool. Reading, in fact, was the very first strike Zack had discovered against him. Gabe didn't think he needed to stop reading--he would never do that--but he didn't think he needed to advertise his love of it, either.

A Gabe divided against himself cannot stand. Gabe reaches the same point we all must reach when we ask ourselves are we happy with the person we are, regardless of what others think? If the answer is no, let's find the problem and change it. If the answer is yes (but couldn't hurt to change a few things), then we're confident in who we are and others will be too. If the answer is yes, because we are perfect, then we're likely a jerk no one else can stand and have the most fixing to do of all.

And that's going to do it. Don't forget to comment to win your Nerd Camp tee-shirt and come on back on Thursday to see Elissa Brent Weissman face the 7 Questions. I'll leave you with some of my favorite passages from Nerd Camp:

Gabe's clothes and camp supplies were laid out across his bed, grouped into categories and stacked in piles. It was a clothing city with T-shirt towers, notebook parks, and a sweatpants river running through the center. Gabe rolled a piece of paper and held it to his mouth like a megaphone. "Attention, residents of Clothes-for-Camp City. This is your mayor speaking. Prepare to be moved into a suitcase and taken to camp. I repeat, prepare to be moved into a suitcase and taken to camp. I repeat, prepare to be moved into a suitcase. You will be transported to camp first thing in the morning..."

...Gabe made his arm into a wrecking ball and rammed it through the T-shirt stack. He simulated the collapse noise. "Pooooochchch!"

His mom was not amused.

"What?" Gabe said as he gathered the T-shirts into a ball and dropped them into his suitcase. "The city has to come down to be transported. I warned the residents. They evacuated."

Zack rolled his eyes, and Gabe rushed into the bathroom to avoid letting Zack see him turn red. Once there, he debated just wearing his T-shirt and underwear to sleep, but, pressing his luck, he reluctantly put on the pajamas he'd brought: a pair of pants and a shirt that had the entire human skeleton on them. Zack raised his eyebrows but didn't comment, and Gabe's clavicles sunk. At least Zack didn't know that he had brought these pajamas on purpose and had planned on performing an original song and dance that named all the bones. He made sure to be in his sleeping bag before his dad turned the lights out, so that Zack wouldn't see that the bones glowed in the dark.

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## **Nadine says**

Sweet book for 3rd/4th grade about a nerd, his new cool step brother and his 6weeks at nerd camp. Message on being yourself and accepting who you are.

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