

Just Around the River Bend: Rivers as the Catalyst for Progression in *The Rock and the River* and *Mermaid in Chelsea Creek*

In Kekla Magoon's *The Rock and the River*, Sam Childs, aged thirteen, feels conflicted as to which form his future should take: does he want to be his father's rock, steadfast and strong, or does he want to be his brother's river, always moving always changing? However, wanting to please both of these males leaves him feeling stuck. He sees possibility so easily in each option, and he desperately wants to make a difference, to participate in his father's and brother's respective fights.

Likewise, in Michelle Tea's *Mermaid in Chelsea Creek*, Sophia Swankowski, also thirteen, is so bored with her life that she resorts to making herself pass out in the name of fun. She can see the bridge to Boston from her neighborhood; the bridge to growth and progression and opportunity. The adults in her life, though, are unable to get her there, as she is too young to drive across it herself.

Once both Sam and Sophia realize that they must continue the battles that their elders have started, they feel invigorated and begin to see life anew. Sam wants safer streets for Maxie; Sophia wants her mother to have the energy at the end of the day to cook dinner.

In *Pocahontas*, Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz's lyrics to "Just Around the River Bend" posit that being still, feeling stuck, is "to be safe." Sam, therefore, must decide whether he "should...choose the smoothest course," whereas Sophia knows she can't "ignore that sound of distant drumming."

Both Sam and Sophia must tread through turbulent waters before they discover that refreshing waters lay just beyond their view. Perry Nodelman suggests that these two works of young adult fiction can be regarded "as didactic fables, they want to urge children to stop being childish and learn to be better and different" (2).

In this paper, I will explore questions such as: what are the advantages and challenges Sam faces should he choose the rock? The river? And why should Sophia still strive to seek out good when the book ends with her plunging head first into Chelsea Creek's turbulence?

Works Cited

Magoon, Kekla. *The Rock and the River*. Aladdin, 2009.

Menken, Alan and Stephen Laurence Schwartz. "Just Around the River Bend." *Pocahontas: An Original Walt Disney Records Soundtrack*, Walt Disney, 1995.

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