

Sample Book Review: Nonfiction

In this review, Jessamy Millican writes about *The Broken Cord*, a true story by Michael Dorris about his struggles with his adopted son, Adam. (From *Merlyn's Pen: Fiction, Essays, and Poems by America's Teens*. Copyright by Merlyn's Pen, Inc. All rights reserved.)

A Preventable Tragedy

The opening paragraph gains the reader's attention.

When writer Michael Dorris adopted his son, he simply wanted to be a father. Before long, he found himself drawn into a tragedy for which there was no easy solution. Dorris's son has fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), a tragic condition that the author writes about in *The Broken Cord*.

Michael Dorris's story begins when he adopts three-year-old Adam, who can barely talk, is not toilet trained, and is extremely small for his age. Despite these disturbing signs, Dorris denies that there is anything wrong with his child. But after Adam suffers a massive seizure followed by many more, Dorris can no longer deny his son's problem.

Years later, the author discovers that Adam's problems stem from his mother's heavy drinking while she was pregnant. Dorris is shocked to discover the skyrocketing problem of fetal alcohol syndrome in our nation, especially among his own people, the Sioux Indians.

The relationship between Dorris and his son is one of love and painful disappointment. Dorris is convinced that although his son has FAS, he will discover some talent that will "make up" for how Adam has been hurt by his mother's drinking. None is ever found. Instead of making progress in school, Adam simply falls further and further behind.

The writer highlights two of the book's major strengths.

One of the book's major strengths is its emotional impact. By the end of the first chapter, I could sense the strong love Dorris feels for his son. It was this love that continued to pull me in throughout the story. My heart breaks along with Dorris's when he realizes that his child will never be "normal."

Another major strength is the book's level of detail. Dorris tells the shocking facts about FAS. He doesn't exaggerate his figures because he doesn't have to. Through his many interviews with experts, Dorris reveals a tragedy that falls heavily on his own people.

In closing, the writer reflects on the book's value.

FAS, the challenges of parenting, disappointment and sorrow—*The Broken Cord* has all of these things and much more. Reading this book is a deeply moving and instructive experience. It will tug at your heart strings and teach you some valuable lessons about life. ■