An Interview with Michael Winerip, 
Author of ADAM CANFIELD OF THE SLASH

Hot off the press from Pulitzer Prize–winning New York Times columnist Michael Winerip—it's his debut novel for young readers!

Meet Adam Canfield: He's the star reporter for the Harris Elementary-Middle school newspaper, the Slash, and he's involved in just about every other extracurricular activity, too—Gladiator quiz bowl, jazz band, statewide test prep class, you name it. And he's just been named coeditor of the Slash alongside his friend Jennifer. He wants to “live life on the edge, dig up the dirt, take dangerous risks for the public good.” Somehow, he always finds himself just a few minutes late. But when a third grader delivers a scoop bigger than any the Slash has ever seen, only Adam can dig deep enough to crack through a cover-up that will rock the very foundations of Harris.

Candlewick: Many ideas for the plot lines in Adam Canfield of the Slash came from your newspaper columns. Can you fill us in?

Mike: Without giving away too much of the plot, I really did cover a smile contest in Louisville, Kentucky, and I really did write about a rich suburb on Long Island, New York, that tried to tear down everyone’s basketball hoops. I also lived through a gold plumbing scandal that forced the resignation of a top school official in Miami, Florida. And I knew a man who made a living finding homes for ornery dogs and a lady who lived like a pauper but left a ton of money to her New Jersey town.

Candlewick: It seems as if there would be a big difference between writing for the New York Times and writing a children’s novel. Did you have any difficulties composing your first young adult book?

Mike: When you write for a newspaper, even the New York Times, you learn to write as simply as possible and to use the clearest words. It’s natural for me to use language that will suit kids.

Candlewick: Adam Canfield is a very funny, kid-friendly page turner, but it’s also a vehicle for you, as a national education columnist for the New York Times, to express your views on current educational and social issues. How do you so seamlessly weave these into the text to convey a message?

Mike: I've spent more than thirty years as a reporter. Every bit of that has gone into writing Adam Canfield of the Slash, although my hope is that kids reading the book will barely notice. They need to be spending their time laughing a lot and worrying whether the Slash's star reporters can wipe out evil before it wipes them out. The social policy is quietly nestled in the background; it makes up the trappings that I hope will make the book feel different and fresh to kids.

Candlewick: When writing Adam Canfield of the Slash, did you look to any children's book authors for inspiration? Who are a few of your favorites?

Mike: My favorite children's writers are Jerry Spinelli, Katherine Paterson, E. B. White, Roald Dahl. And two of my favorite books are The Tale of Despereaux and Because of Winn-Dixie.

Candlewick: In your view, how important are trade books, like your own Adam Canfield of the Slash, in turning children into readers?

Mike: Part of the joy of reading is starting at the front cover and when you finally get to the back cover, closing that book and putting it away with a feeling of accomplishment and a tinge of sadness; the good ones always end too soon. Adam Canfield of the Slash is meant to be a fun read, but at the same time it's filled with all kinds of tough ethical problems that kids—and adults—try to puzzle through daily. I hope a young reader will see that you don’t have to fly away to a faraway kingdom or ride on a magic train to find battles of epic proportion.