

BOOKTALK by Sybil M. Touré

Overall Opening - Introduction of the Theme

Good Day everyone. Welcome. My name is Sybil Touré. Today's booktalk is focused on the theme: ***The Strength that Comes from a Bond.***

Now, there are graphic novels that show we can't always overcome and improve on our own. But, with help from others, we can overcome, and be transformed. The bonds we form can lead to discovery, change and getting things done. It's about the unlocking of hidden potential and inner strength and the allies that help along the way.

Three books - - *The Prince and the Dressmaker*, *Bloom*, and *Lumberjanes*: Beware the kitten Holy, illustrate this theme - - the strength that comes from a bond.

Transition: Let's start with *The Prince and the Dressmaker* by Jen Wang.

Summary: In this historical fiction, the young Prince Sebastian is heir to the throne of Belgonia. His parents, the king and queen, want him to get married, so they arrange visits with potential princess brides. But the reserved teenage prince has a secret... He loves to wear dresses. He befriends the lowly dressmaker Frances who transforms him—boosting his self-confidence by dressing him in the bold, elegant garments she makes, and he absolutely loves wearing about town, as his feminine persona. The dresses become the talk of Paris as the two become best friends. Frances receives accolades for her fashion design and dressmaking talents. When the king, who is also a polo-loving, military leader, suddenly falls ill, Prince Sebastian decides that he must leave his fashion strutting night life behind, propose to Princess Juliana, and prepare himself to step up as ruler of the kingdom to please his parents by continuing his family's traditions. He leaves his wardrobe to his good friend Frances. Can the prince's secret remain under wraps amid his fashion notoriety and newfound self-assurance?

Impression: Here's what you will absolutely adore about this book. It has many of the trappings of a Cinderella-like fairy tale - - the elegant ballgowns, an eligible heir to the throne, social stratification, a prince with a different vision of himself and his future than the one his parents envision for him, a lowly seamstress -- but the ending is triumphant without feeling sappy, cliché, or contrived.

You will be thrilled by every development, and your heart will absolutely be warmed by the characters' nurturing, supportive relationships.

Closing: Because of the well-developed, lovable, and relatable cast of characters and the sweet, compelling, modern-day themes, it's easy to imagine this book adapted for a stage play, or an animated movie, like *FROZEN* or another Disney film.

And it's a perfect read if you're looking for a sweet queer narrative, fit for all ages.

Transition: For more queer sweetness, but in a thoroughly contemporary setting, there's *Bloom* by Kevin Panetta and Savanna Ganucheau.

Imagine! Romance blooming in a family bakery amid Baklava, Sanakopita, Sourdough rolls, and Red Velvet Cupcakes! Ever wanted to desperately flee a place or a situation only to discover that under the right circumstances, this god-awful place you want to run from might be exactly where you'd rather be, and would be more than happy to stay? Well, this is what happens in Bloom.

Summary: Aristotle Kyrkos - - called Ari, desperately wants to move to the big city with his band to pursue a musical career. His friends have moved on, but he feels stuck. His parents need him to stay and help run the failing family bakery. Hoping to find a worker to take his place so he can leave, he recruits Hector Galeai, a culinary student in town to settle his grandmother's estate. Hector is an enthusiastic baker of Samoan origin who loves the very thing Ari is trying to flee. By the middle of the book, Ari is enthusiastically pouring and mixing milk and flour. Working alongside Hector, Ari begins to enjoy baking as a romance slowly develops between the two. And Hector's grandmother's recipes for Keke Fa'i (Samoan banana cake) are incorporated into the Greek bakery's menu. As Hector and Ari watch Mr. and Mrs. Kyrkos knead and stretch dough to make Phyllo, Hector says dreamily: "I would love to have something like that... to be on a team with someone and to be better together than you could ever be alone. It's so sweet don't you think" and Ari responds, equally dreamily, "Yeah, it is."

Impressions: The art in this graphic novel is gorgeous. Along with black lines, the art is colored with only a soft cyan, used in both subtle and bold ways. The presence of food in the story is emphasized through the art. There are double-page spreads and montages of enticing baked goods being lovingly prepared by the characters who are visibly enjoying kitchen time. Everything about this story is sweet.

Closing: Expect to be tickled by the gradual bloom of love amid flour and industrial mixers. But, what about Ari's passion for music and moving away? That's ***Bloom*** by Kevin Panetta and Savannah Ganucheau.

Transition: The third and final book is *Lumberjanes: Beware Kitten Holy*, by Noelle Stevenson, Grace Ellis and Shannon Watters.

If you are vaguely familiar with the names Bessie Coleman, Mae Jemison, Phyllis Wheatley and Juliette Gordon Low, you might know that these women are pioneers in their fields - aviation, space exploration, poetry, and scouting. But what could possibly bring them together in a comic about an outdoorsy scouting troop?

Summary: Lumberjanes scouts are young women dedicated to exploring their love of the outdoors. Set at a summer camp, this book follows the adventures of five best friends, Jo, April, Mal, Molly and Ripley as they work together to earn their Lumberjanes scout badges. The badges have interesting names like: the Up all Night Badge, the Naval Gauging Badge, The Everything Under the Sun Badge, and the Robin Hood Badge. In trekking through forests, navigating waterways, exploring caves, and deciphering puzzles, the five buddies encounter supernatural creatures, a mysterious group of boys, and risk their lives battling them. But this is a troop of strong women dedicated to overcoming challenges together. Their exclamations of frustration, shock and awe are expressed not in vulgarities but in the names of accomplished

women. For example, when the Lumberjanes cascade down swirling rapids in their canoes - “Holy Mae Jemison! “ During a nighttime outdoor adventure, undertaken without Jen, the Camp Counselor, Molly says: “Oh my Bessie Coleman, can we just worry about getting back to camp before Jen wakes up?!”

Impressions: The variety in the girls’ personalities creates a wonderfully effective team dynamic. Each page is packed with terrific colorful visuals giving the impression that the action is jumping from and through the page. This book’s energetic art and adventurous storyline would be especially enjoyable to visual readers.

Closing: Scouts have a pledge, right - -“ I promise to do my best” and so on? Well, the Lumberjanes have a seriously empowering pledge. Hear this:

I solemnly swear to do my best every day, and in all that I do, to be brave and strong, to be truthful and compassionate, to be interesting and interested, to pay attention and question the world around me, to think of others first, to always help and protect my friends, then there's a line about God or whatever, and make the world a better place for Lumberjane scouts and everyone else. That's the pledge!

Folks, delve into the adventure of these five friends and be empowered. That’s Lumberjanes by Noelle Stevenson, Grace Ellis and Shannon Watters.

Conclusion Wrap Up

Let me leave you with this. What the main characters in these three books have in common is that they successfully faced their individual struggles and overcame their personal challenges with the help of others. Whether through friendship, romance, or teamwork—the bonds the characters formed provided the strength and confidence to help advance major life decisions. Once again, the three books are: *The Prince and the Dressmaker*, *Bloom*, and *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy*.

Thank you for listening!