



## YA Café Podcast

### Episode II: *If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say* 03 May 2018

- Danielle: [00:03](#) Welcome to the YA Café, where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say" by Leila Sales. Grab your favorite beverage friends, and let's talk books.
- Ad: [00:18](#) Do you have a product you'd like to get in front of teachers, librarians and other book lovers? If so email us at [yacafepodcast@gmail.com](mailto:yacafepodcast@gmail.com).
- Amanda: [00:28](#) Welcome y'all! As always, our first segment will be spoiler free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher
- Danielle: [00:33](#) and I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th Grade English teacher, and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](http://teachnouvelle.com). In Leila Sales' newest novel "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say" Winter Halperin gets caught up in a storm of online shaming after she posted a racist comment about the winner of the National Spelling Bee. She tries to defend herself, tries to apologize, claim she can't be racist because she has black friends. It's a whole thing, but when her college acceptances rescinded and her future is put on hold, she is forced to reckon with her actions. OK, so this was a book I was prepared to hate.
- Amanda: [01:09](#) \*laughter\* Wow. Just throwing it out there.
- Danielle: [01:12](#) I am just throwing it out there. I was super hesitant about this novel. I didn't know, I didn't know how anyone would approach this super-complex issue of online shaming, and I was super hesitant and super nervous, but, great novel. How about you? What did you think, Amanda?
- Amanda: [01:29](#) Yeah, no, I felt similar. I'm not going to say I was "prepared to hate it", that seems like a lot, but uh, I was not sure how this topic was going to be handled. But very early on I saw a clear sign from the author that she's not in it to turn this girl who said a racist thing into a martyr, uh, with regards to like the Internet storm that followed her. So with that cue early on, I think it made it clear that this is going to be a book that I was going to enjoy.
- Danielle: [02:01](#) Yeah, that cue, that moment that you're talking about, was absolutely it for me. Um, this is not a spoiler, it happens extremely early on in the novel. Basically, as soon as Winter writes this apology online, this quote unquote apology, and says that she has black friends, she goes over to visit one of these friends and he calls her out for completely being ignorant of her actions and not accepting her privilege. "I can't believe I have to explain this to you", Jason said, "Not everyone has spent their life in a good town with a good school system. Not everyone is trusted like you, were given the benefit of the doubt like you, were

expected to do great things like you. A lot of people are fighting seriously uphill battle just to get treated with the basic respect you go through your whole life, assuming you're entitled to."

- Amanda: [02:01](#) Yeah
- Danielle: [02:51](#) And I love this moment. It happened very early on and this was where I was like, yes, I can absolutely trust Leila Sales. She's going to take us in a good direction.
- Amanda: [03:00](#) Yeah, I still wouldn't say absolutely trust, but at the very least, like, she, she gets some part of the picture, even if her character doesn't. So it was crucially important to have Jason very early on, I think.
- Danielle: [03:13](#) And one thing I wanted to talk about before we went any further was that in this novel it is made very clear, also in the same conversation with Jason, that Winter was not trying to reveal any systemic oppression or anything like that in a way that was just taken poorly by the online community, her tweet really had racist intentions. Um, Jason asks her, "Why do you think there aren't more black champions?" And Winter says, "I don't know, maybe they're bad spellers."
- Amanda: [03:45](#) Yeah, and it's interesting that you say "racist intentions", because that's something that Winter talks about a lot through the novel, because she says like, 'I am not racist, like, I've never had racist thoughts or opinions ' and yet she still makes this comment that is clearly racist, but doesn't realize. She just says 'I didn't mean it that way', and somehow that is supposed to absolve her, even though, like, clearly she harbors these racist thoughts that maybe black people are just bad spellers, but she still can't see that.
- Danielle: [04:14](#) Absolutely. And she's benefited from a system where she is trusted automatically, and she hasn't had to have the same battle that Jason has faced. And she has some other friends.
- Amanda: [04:26](#) Yeah, and they're pretty fun friends, I think, uh, Corey and Mackler. And both of them are very quick to dismiss this whole chaos that is surrounding her because of this tweet.
- Danielle: [04:35](#) Right. They believe her intentions and they forgive her pretty instantly. And Corey is black, so it brings into the picture very early on that black people are not a monolithic ...
- Amanda: [04:48](#) I think Corey says that, doesn't he? Like, I think he says in the novel like, 'Oh yeah, well Jason and I don't have to agree'.
- Danielle: [04:56](#) Right. And I thought that that was really great. And Corey and Mackler were just looking to get back to life as usual.
- Amanda: [04:56](#) Just dude-ing around.
- Danielle: [05:04](#) \*laughter\* They want to make a video to win a Gatorade contest

Amanda: [05:04](#) As one does.

Danielle: [05:11](#) We also meet (in this novel) Winters family. We mostly get her relationship with her mother, her mother is a mommy blogger and had, has this whole brand called "Turn Towards the Sun".

Amanda: [05:25](#) Ta-dah! \*laughter\* It kind of reminded me, do you remember, did you watch Rugrats?

Danielle: [05:25](#) Yes.

Amanda: [05:27](#) So do you remember the Lipschitz who is like the parenting person

Danielle: [05:27](#) guru?

Amanda: [05:32](#) Yeah, he was like the guru that Tommy Pickles' mom was always referring to, and then it turns out that the Lipschitz hated children and was afraid of them. \*laughter\*

Danielle: [05:42](#) Which, Winters mom, like, doesn't hate children, but she does have this whole philosophy of like, 'letting your children pursue their own excellence and do what they want, and they'll turn towards the sun'. So when Winter's world kind of crashes around her, her mothers brand also suffers

Amanda: [06:01](#) Yeah, because if your parenting raises somebody who says a racist thing, maybe your parenting is terrible.

Danielle: [06:01](#) \*laughter\*

Amanda: [06:01](#) And the whole thing crumbles.

Danielle: [06:08](#) The whole thing crumbles. In this novel we also have Winters sister, Emerson, who is at college for a performing arts degree. So, Emerson is like, you know, turning towards her sun

Amanda: [06:08](#) Gross

Danielle: [06:28](#) and living her dream, while Winters world is falling apart. Like, you know, Emerson is dealing with her own stuff, but Winter can't see it because she's completely self-absorbed.

Amanda: [06:36](#) So the Emerson stuff is a part of it, and the family stuff is a part of it, and all these other parts of our life that are effected by her making this racist comment, but the center of this novel is really about the online shaming that Winter is suddenly in the middle of when she gets retweeted and goes viral, and all of a sudden she's like the most hated person on twitter. For like 12 hours, because that's about how long these things last.

Danielle: [06:36](#) But 12 hours is enough to like

- Amanda: [07:03](#) Oh, that's like seven years in internet time.
- Danielle: [07:03](#) Yeah.
- Amanda: [07:05](#) Yeah. So then all of a sudden she's this like deeply infamous person and she is synonymous with like, racism and white supremacy and the whole thing just explodes out of her control.
- Danielle: [07:17](#) So we want to do some general talking about online shaming before we get back to talking about this book. Um, because a lot of the questions raised in this novel are like, you know, "What is an appropriate way to relate to each other online?" "Should shame be a tool?" "What does shame accomplish, if anything?", "And how do quote unquote victims of online shaming move past that?" And it just want to start by saying that Leila Sales was strongly influenced by John Ronson's book, "So You've Been Publicly Shamed", and also Monica Lewinsky's silenced breaking TED Talk about her experience being shamed online in a, in a brand new internet world. Right? This was at the very beginning. And so before we continue our conversation, I think it's really important to kind of, like, draw some lines, right? Monica Lewinsky was publicly shamed for something that she truly was a victim of. There was a power dynamic at play there. She did not have these malicious intentions even though she was later maligned. So she truly is a victim of online shaming and we have seen that, and you know, kids today are like bullied online, and they are true victims.
- Amanda: [08:39](#) Yeah, I think that's, that's really true. And so person like Monica Lewinsky is very different from a person like, like Bill Cosby. So as of this podcast recording, uh, Bill Cosby was just convicted of sexual assault on three counts, and that's something that would not have been possible without this very concerted, continuous internet campaign of not only his accusers and people supporting his accusers, but the entire #MeToo movement, which has been huge, like, it's been incredible for our culture and for, like, believing women. So it's not like it's always this malicious tool against innocent people.
- Danielle: [09:17](#) Right. And sometimes particularly when the justice system is ill equipped or reluctant to deal with things, it can be a way to create cultural change in terms of, like, saying "This behavior is not okay with us".
- Amanda: [09:35](#) Yeah. So I think that like the Bill Cosby thing for example, and then if you're, if you want to go away from bigger like celebrities and just be like, "oh, well yeah, he's a public figure already", but like one of the big things for a while, particularly after the Charlottesville Nazi rally was people were like, finding pictures of all these guys who were out carrying torches and chanting racist slogans and saying, "Oh, this is Kevin. He works at Office Depot, email his manager and let him know that he's a white supremacist" and, like, things like that I think are really valuable tools for combating these things that should not be social norms, should not be tolerated as just like part of the public discourse and even if it's not illegal, like there's nothing preventing them from going out and organizing and chanting and everything, it's in their First Amendment rights or whatnot, but like, we as people who can make it not culturally OK.

- Danielle: [10:32](#) Absolutely. And then lastly, an important distinction to draw is, you know, if you advocate for a kinder online world, like it is never okay for me a white woman to try and tell a person of color how they're allowed to interact with people.
- Amanda: [10:53](#) Eh, I mean, yes, I think that is mostly true. But there were some instances in this novel, particularly where Winter describes that there's people saying like, that she should be murdered, she should be raped, like all these kinds of things, like, not really going to be OK coming from anybody. Like there's definitely lines that were crossed as far as like how people talk to her and treated her that I don't think we can ever say are acceptable from anybody. And to, specifically to a 17-year-old girl with no power like ...
- Danielle: [11:26](#) Right. And to be clear, since this is the spoiler free section and people haven't read the book, like, I'll just come out and tell you that these online comments in the book are completely identified. She doesn't know who they, or if she knows she doesn't share with us like who they're coming from, so we're not talking about specific instances from the book, we're just talking generally.
- Amanda: [11:46](#) So when we talk about tone policing, like, I'm not saying that people shouldn't be angry. Like obviously people reading what she wrote or hearing when she said or think, like, should be able to be angry and should be able to express that anger and not be told like "calm down" or "you're overreacting" or anything dumb like that. But, I don't think we can ever condone, like, threats, harassment, things like that, you know?
- Danielle: [12:13](#) Yeah, I agree. And I think that that's like one thing that makes this book so interesting is that, I'm still developing my feelings about online shaming and trying to think of all of these different perspectives, and I think that this novel really invites conversation about that and provide some hypothetical situations. And then kind of asks the reader to take it from there and form your own opinions and look into instances of people who have been shamed and develop some empathy, and just come to kind of a solid thinking for yourself about how you want to go into the world. And then kind of the last thing to consider, and this will be really important as we move into our spoiler informed section, is like, "What if the person who said something atrocious is a kid?". Now kids have the Internet and they can say all the dumb stuff that kids think, online.
- Danielle: [13:14](#) And with that friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back, we'll share about Things We Like A Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say" and dig a little deeper.
- New Speaker: [13:14](#) \*musical interlude\*
- Amanda: [13:43](#) Welcome back, y'all. It's time for Thing We Like A Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?
- Danielle: [13:45](#) This week I read "Ship It" by Britta Lundin. Britta London is a writer for Riverdale, which I just started watching, and this was originally supposed to be the book for this week. It's about fandom and, like, a comic-con situation, but as I was reading it I discovered that this book is un-recommendable to students.

\*laughter\* And, like, I don't want to go into it a ton here, but basically it is about a fandom of, like, a show similar to Supernatural in feel. Anyway, so I wrote this blog post called "The Un-recommendable Book" that goes into my feelings about recommending more or less subversive books to students and how it's really difficult for teachers to do that because sometimes, you know, subversive books could get you fired, and then other times, like, recommending a book to a student makes the book less cool. So, "Ship It" by Britta Lundin is a great book and I hope students read it, but teachers can't exactly tell students to read it. Anyway, more in my blog post, but a great book, "Ship It" by Britta Lundin. How about you Amanda?

- Amanda: [15:05](#) So my Thing I Like A Latte this week is a podcast that I have listened to you for quite a long time, since it actually started in 2016, called Code Switch. It's an NPR podcast, it's about race and culture, and every week they do like a different, sort of, deep dive into one topic or another. Um, and a couple of weeks ago there was an episode called "Location, Location, Location" that was particularly excellent. They talk about the role of housing laws and road construction and redlining in segregating communities, and how this has affected particularly black and low income communities in America. And it's really great if you have ever wondered, "Why is Martin Luther King Jr. always a bad neighborhood? Like, or a low income neighborhood? And they delve into that and it's really a great podcast. All of their episodes are wonderful, but I really enjoyed this, that's Code Switch on NPR.
- Danielle: [15:57](#) Yep, that's a great show.
- Danielle: [15:59](#) We're going to take a break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say". The rest of the show may contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back!
- music: [15:59](#) \*musical interlude\*
- Ad: [16:31](#) Support for this podcast comes from Audible. Audible is offering listeners of the YA Café, a free Thirty Day Trial and a free audio book to get you started. Y'all, I love audio books! I listen to them all the time, whether I am grocery shopping, or in the car or, on a walk with Padfoot. It is just one more way to get more books in my day. Check us out at [audibletrial.com/yacafe](http://audibletrial.com/yacafe). Happy reading!
- music: [16:31](#) \*musical interlude\*
- Amanda: [17:03](#) Welcome back, y'all, to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on "If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say". If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.
- Danielle: [17:03](#) Spoilers!
- Amanda: [17:03](#) And yoga.
- Danielle: [17:03](#) No yoga.

Amanda: [17:03](#) There's definitely yoga.

Danielle: [17:17](#) There is totally yoga, but not pirates.

Amanda: [17:21](#) No pirates. All right, so the yoga that we are referring to happens at this retreat called "Revibe".

Danielle: [17:21](#) Revibe!

Amanda: [17:30](#) And it's this retreat that Winter finds online to rehabilitate yourself and to become a better person. And it's this, you know, big mansion in Malibu, they have a dolphin fountain, blah, blah, blah. They do a lot of yoga.

Danielle: [17:30](#) They eat Kale

Amanda: [17:49](#) They eat Kale. \*laughter\* Anyway, it's a whole big thing.

Danielle: [17:53](#) So, this philosophy has been put together by this husband/wife pair, and it involves writing apologies to the people you've wronged and apologizing to everyone, whether or not you mean it. Kind of fake it til you make it.

Amanda: [18:07](#) Yeah, and can we talk about how garbage, like, a lot of the other people who were there, their reasons for being there were? And how crappy it was that, like, they didn't delineate between their crimes?

Danielle: [18:21](#) Yeah. So, as an example, one of the dudes that's there put his neighbor's cat down the garbage chute.

Amanda: [18:27](#) "Put" is a delicate word. He threw that cat down the garbage chute and nearly killed it.

Danielle: [18:35](#) Yeah, left it to die. Uh, felt bad about his crime, went down to find the cat. Found it bloody and like, dying, and left it on the neighbor lady's doorstep.

Amanda: [18:43](#) Not the greatest. But, so, more than him. I was thinking about there's this one guy, Richard, and this made me so angry that he was there, because he had been publicly shamed online because a tiger snuck into his backyard while his daughter was playing, and so he shot the tiger. Because if there's a tiger in your backyard and you have a gun and your child is there,

Danielle: [18:43](#) You're gonna shoot the tiger

Amanda: [19:10](#) You're going to shoot the tiger. And so like the fact that it

Danielle: [19:10](#) We're going to get shamed now.

Amanda: [19:10](#) Oh my gosh, no

Danielle: [19:15](#) People are gonna be like this podcast is pro tiger killing.

- Amanda: [19:19](#) \*laughter\* That's really true, we're going to get dragged online. Oh, it's so ironic. Uh ...
- Danielle: [19:19](#) \*laughter\*
- Amanda: [19:24](#) No, but I mean like, so I was really frustrated by that because people were like "Why didn't you run out and grab your daughter?", and I thought that was ridiculous that they acted like he had something to apologize for, and he did not, in my opinion. Him and, uh, Keisha as well. Keisha was just living her life and people were like, "how dare you be black and living your life?"
- Danielle: [19:44](#) Right? So, it's kind of like this "Breakfast Club" mix of people who have been shamed online. They do yoga, stuff happens. Now, while this is happening, Winter really wants to know how her posts got retweeted, and how this flood of stuff happened, because she'd only had like 100 followers or whatever. And she's able to track down the original retweet, and it's like this reporter who had done a story on her mom and she wants revenge, and she, like, calls the reporter and they end up having a pretty great relationship. This reporter basically asks her to do, you know, an exposé of life within Revibe, and at the end of the novel, Winter actually turns this into her Third Option. So she's not going to completely apologize for everything she's done, she definitely wants to explain her growth as a person, she's not just going to make a blanket apology to everyone who said that she should kill herself. Right? Like, that's what Kevin wants, Kevin wants an apology to everyone who's been hurt by her actions and Winter's like, "No, really I just want to apologize to Jason." And she does. And that is a great third option.
- Amanda: [21:09](#) Yeah, I'm still not sure where I, where I stand on the ending and her writing. I don't know. I'm not sure. I don't think it's satisfying in lot of ways. I don't think that she goes far enough in acknowledging, like, why she tweeted that in the first place, that it wasn't just a dumb moment, that she has like these internalized racist ideas.
- Danielle: [21:29](#) Right. And she also says in the end that she is writing to other people who've been shamed online and she named some people who I'm like, "Uh well, you know, like that's not the greatest person. They probably don't need your support."
- Amanda: [21:45](#) Yeah. And I guess it's like the whole point of the book, they're like, "Oh these people are people too", but like if these people suck, like, I don't know. Like, Winter was humanized throughout this book and that was the whole point, but like, she did still say this terrible thing. But she was only 17, like it was a one time dashed off thing, she has a lot to learn. I said a lot of dumb stuff when I was 17, 18, that I would be absolutely mortified if anybody heard now and thought that I still held these beliefs, because you just learn a lot of dumb stuff when you're a kid.
- Danielle: [21:45](#) Right.
- Amanda: [22:15](#) And you have to unlearn it.



- Danielle: [22:16](#) And it was a quieter world. Like, even though we had the internet when we were teenagers, it was still a quieter world. Like, I didn't have the ability to say my opinions on Twitter. And like, I had a kid say to me once, like, that "poor people don't fold their shirts because they don't care what people think of them", and like, I'm glad that kid wasn't able to Tweet that, you know?
- Amanda: [23:39](#) Joke's on your kid, I'm not poor anymore and I still don't fold my shirts. \*laughter\* I mean, yeah, but especially when you look at the people that she names that she is reaching out to, and one of them is like this reporter who systematically, like, tricked closeted politicians and public figures into going on dates with them, and then outing them. Yeah. Like that's not, that's not the same.
- Danielle: [23:03](#) Yeah, and that person doesn't need your support.
- Amanda: [23:07](#) Yeah. So, I agree, I thought that it was weird that it was like, that it jumped from humanizing and understanding this kid who said a dumb thing, who has a lot to learn and got like attacked online, and grown adults who continue to say and perform homophobic, racist, sexist, garbage.
- Danielle: [23:07](#) Intentionally.
- Amanda: [23:28](#) Intentionally. And they're not in the same universe.
- Danielle: [23:30](#) No, not at all. Absolutely not. And ...
- Amanda: [23:33](#) They're all, they're all informed by the same universe, like, they're all informed by white supremacy and everything. But you can't hold, in the moral court of the Internet, you should not hold like a 17-year-old kid as accountable as a 35-year-old reporter, for what they say and do online.
- Danielle: [23:49](#) Right, absolutely. And I feel like the end sort of fed into this garbage narrative of 'kindness is all we need'.
- Amanda: [23:58](#) Yeah. I felt that a little bit.
- Danielle: [23:59](#) And sometimes kindness is not all we need. Sometimes we need some harsh truth and some tough love and some, you know, rounding up of your own who make mistakes.
- Amanda: [24:12](#) Yeah. And I will say that I think that this book would have been less weird for me at the end if they had just kept it with, like, Winter learning that she had a lot more to learn about herself. With Winter like, acknowledging that she has like, said some dumb things, pulling back, trying to learn more. I don't feel like we really got that a lot
- Danielle: [24:12](#) Right.
- Amanda: [24:31](#) And just reaching it out to like this wider world of, like, people posting racist things wasn't excellent for me.

- Danielle: [24:39](#) I agree. So one of the eye opening moments in this book for Winter was when she snuck out to a convenient store with some of her fellow "Vibers",
- Amanda: [24:39](#) Gross
- Danielle: [24:52](#) \*laughter\* and she witnesses the cashiers racist interaction with a fellow viber, Keisha.
- Amanda: [25:02](#) And Winter realized that Keisha had to deal with this every day.
- Danielle: [25:03](#) Yeah. And this reminded me of this moment in the book. "So You Want To Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo where she makes an analogy between microaggressions, (so like the little moments of racism people of color have to deal with every day), and walking down the sidewalk and getting punched in the arm, like, 100 times every day. And there's going to be a moment where you punch back. And that person who punched you may not have been the first person to punch you or the worst person to punch you, but that's going to be like, it. And so these daily racists interactions are just like constantly getting punched in the arm according to Oluo, and it was a real wake-up call for Winter.
- Amanda: [25:52](#) Yeah, she cites that later on in the novel as the source of her awakening. But I mean I'm also like, "Man, you've had this Internet the whole time, and you've googled yourself how many times?"
- Danielle: [26:02](#) You could just google, like, "How not to be racist"
- Amanda: [26:06](#) like, "Am I racist?" And you would get a lot of good, good information
- Danielle: [26:09](#) And one of the things we'll link to in the show notes is this great, like, "Hundred ways not to be racist" list of things, so that you don't have to be like Winter.
- Amanda: [26:21](#) Don't be like Winter, find out if you're racist today! \*laughter\* So Winter having this interaction and like, seeing this happen to Keisha, and it being the thing that starts her thinking about it, is a good first step. I wish we had seen more of her, her journey afterward. Not even her journey afterward, just her acknowledging that it was going to be a journey, you know, like, "Oh, there's a lot I don't get, and I really need to work on it" kind of thing.
- Danielle: [26:47](#) Right. Completely agree. But overall I think it's a great book. Thought provoking.
- Amanda: [26:52](#) I agree. Definitely enjoyed it. Just thought it got a little squirrell-y at the very end, but overall I thought it was a really good look at the topic.
- Danielle: [27:01](#) And that's our show for today, friends. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast, we'd love to hear from you. And if you're enjoying the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. Happy reading!