



YA Café Podcast
Episode 32: *Salt*
01 November 2018

- Danielle: [00:01](#) Welcome to the YA Cafe where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *Salt* by Hannah Moskowitz. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.
- Amanda: [00:19](#) 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: [00:25](#) and I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th grade English teacher and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](#). Monster hunting on a wide ocean is all the Indy knows and he knows that he hates it when his parents vanish on a long hunt. His older sister takes control of the family leading Indy and his two younger siblings to continue the fight. Indy has to choose between the siblings he loves desperately and a life of peace on land that feels like all he's ever wanted. All right. Amanda, I have a burning question.
- Amanda: [00:54](#) I'm ready.
- Danielle: [00:55](#) This book takes place on a boat. How did you feel about that boat? Did you feel like you were on a boat?
- Amanda: [01:01](#) I did. I think that a big advantage of this book had versus the other boat books that we have read was that Indy really hates it a lot, so he does things like complain about the waves and the salt everywhere and everything being wet and I think that really made it feel more like being on a boat.
- Danielle: [01:20](#) Yeah!
- Amanda: [01:22](#) (pirate voice) "the hearty seas of adventure!" Like you know, being out there sucks sometimes and
- Danielle: [01:26](#) yeah, Hannah writes that everything is wet except your skin, which is always dry.
- Amanda: [01:34](#) It's so real
- Danielle: [01:36](#) and I imagine it's a bit like how when we lived in Florida, everything we had was slightly sandy all the time.
- Amanda: [01:43](#) Yup. Except that it's salt and it's the most corrosive thing and so I really liked that it was this continuous annoyance in Indy's life that never goes away.

- Danielle: [01:53](#) All right, so you and I both come into this book with a lot of Hannah Moskowitz baggage, but like baggage in the best sense.
- Amanda: [02:00](#) There has to be a better word than baggage, right?
- Danielle: [02:02](#) It's literary baggage. Like I don't mean like emotional baggage. I mean that literary baggage and we all know that literary baggage is wonderful and it's like coming home from a candy store full of
- Amanda: [02:12](#) bags of books?
- Danielle: [02:13](#) Candy Books
- Amanda: [02:14](#) Candy books. Yes. So I am friends with Hannah and have been for a long time, uh, but more than that we have read most of her books and really, really like her writing style. And if you have read anything else by Hannah Moskowitz and like it, you're probably going to like Salt.
- Danielle: [02:30](#) Yeah. And I always tell my students about Hannah because she got her first book published very early.
- Amanda: [02:37](#) 17 I think.
- Danielle: [02:39](#) Yeah. And so, you know, if she got her book published at seventeen, she was writing it long before that I think it's definitely like an awesome inspirational story of a young woman who's getting it done before the age of 25 or whatever. So I did want to talk about some of her awesome titles and this is like things we like "a lot" "a latte!" kind of to start us off. *Invincible Summer* we both read and loved
- Amanda: [03:05](#) and I think *Invincible Summer* shares a lot of its DNA with this book and that it's a very complicated sibling relationship and very connected to the ocean but in a very different way. Like it's this beach house that they come back to every year. But that family relationship is always like a really common thread in her books
- Danielle: [03:23](#) and you know there's trauma in *Invincible Summer*. There's trauma in *Salt*. And another book that I felt this shared some DNA with was *History of Glitter and Blood*, which is like a gritty book except that instead of *Salt*, it's like fairy specs.
- Amanda: [03:42](#) I love that book so much.
- Danielle: [03:44](#) Me Too.
- Amanda: [03:44](#) So good. And then another one that is a lot like this, is *Teeth* and the like, darker side of the oceans, magic sort of thing. And I think that it's really nice to have an author who is willing to have such raw writing for really weird things.
- Danielle: [04:00](#) And I will say that we saw Hannah last weekend at a wedding and I asked her about this book and she said that she viewed it as a companion to *Teeth*.

- Amanda: [04:13](#) Oh, I didn't hear that conversation. That's cool.
- Danielle: [04:15](#) Yeah. And so definitely like not you must have read Teeth to understand Salt, but she knows that they share DNA. It was intentional. It was the dark side of the ocean thing that you said and you know, they both have some magic in them and some monsters. And of course siblings.
- Amanda: [04:34](#) Yeah. I also think that if we're saying Teeth and this strong way, it's important to mention that Teeth is a really dark book. Like there's a lot of abuse in the book and a lot of like disturbing imagery that could be difficult for a lot of people, but it's still a great book and very worth reading.
- Danielle: [04:52](#) And while we're on the topic of hard books, I have to say that Salt was a lot lighter than I thought it would be.
- Amanda: [05:00](#) It was actually pretty light and a lot of ways, not in a frivolous sort of way.
- Danielle: [05:04](#) Yeah. When I think of Hannah, I think of somebody who writes gritty, raw, real trauma and drama and Salt may have been gritty and raw and real, but it had nothing on Teeth in terms of that.
- Amanda: [05:18](#) True, but I thought it was really great.
- Danielle: [05:20](#) Okay, so we have danced around the idea of sibling relationships. Let's just outline the sibling relationships that exist in this book. We have Indy, he's our narrator and he is the second oldest child, his older sister is Belleza, and she is sort of taking charge of the family after their parents go missing and then their slightly younger brother is Oscar who is, you know, a 13 year old, terrible boy. And then the youngest is Zulu and she's six. But like one of the first things that we see her do is butcher a sea monster after they've killed it. It's her job.
- Amanda: [05:56](#) She's got to get in there. So there's definitely some questions about the place in monster hunting that these younger siblings have, but like, at the same time, it is their job. I really loved - with all of these siblings here - I feel like sometimes it gets overlooked that each combination of siblings has a different relationship. But you really see that here, like Zulu and Oscar get on each other's nerves, Bella and Indy see each other as kind of like the captain and first mate, but in a very weird sort of dynamic and I really like how every character has their own relationship with Indy and their own relationship with each other.
- Danielle: [06:36](#) Yeah, me too. So they all feel real siblings and they all have different relationships with each other and they all have different relationships to monster hunting. So they are called Sicarios, which is the word for hunter in the Spanish lore, like it's not the Spanish word for hunter, but it's like...
- Amanda: [06:57](#) In real Spanish lore? Or in just in the book?
- Danielle: [07:00](#) I think it's just in the book?

Amanda: [07:01](#) Oh, I dunno. We should have googled it. [break] Update. We googled it through the magic of editing and it means hitman or hired killer, which is very enjoyable.

Danielle: [07:13](#) So they're the monster hitmen hit family

Amanda: [07:17](#) Witchers

Danielle: [07:17](#) there. Witchers. Okay. So I feel like in the last 30 seconds we have exposed some pop culture DNA shared with this book, Supernatural,

Amanda: [07:30](#) So much Supernatural. If you go online and just read like the top line of all these good reviews. Most of them are like "Supernatural, but on the ocean!" (Danielle laughs) Very common.

Danielle: [07:41](#) Yes. But like done with love.

Amanda: [07:44](#) So, while it is true that the description of it sounds very supernaturally, I think that the actual story here is not so much monster hunting as finding your place in a family and it's a very small family story. Not so much like a monster hunting story. Would you agree with that?

Danielle: [08:01](#) Yeah. I mean like every compelling novel is like a story that transcends its blurb.

Amanda: [08:07](#) Yeah. But I mean even even more than that, I think that like the care and attention that is given to the descriptions of different actions, it's not the monster fighting. Those tend to happen in kind of a blur. It's the moments where Oscar is sick and falls asleep curled next to Zulu. Like that's where the care is for both. I assume the writer and the reader. Like that's what the book is built around those moments, not the monster hunting moments.

Danielle: [08:34](#) Right. You know, what compels us about monster literature is how the humans react to the monsters not really the monsters themselves. I could be off base, but like Buffy is a great show because of her relationship with her friends and her relationship with her mentors.

Amanda: [08:54](#) Yeah. But I think that in all of those things, like the monsters feel a lot more present than in this book because like the monsters particularly in Buffy are a super big allegory for whatever Buffy has going on at the moment. You know?

Danielle: [09:07](#) Right.

Amanda: [09:07](#) It still feels like the story is about Buffy fighting monsters. It's just that the monster is like the stand in for the looming specter of adulthood or whatever.

Danielle: [09:16](#) Okay. Well we can just agree to disagree on that way, but it's true that the monsters do not feel very allegorical in Salt. So we talked about the sibling relationship and how they have different relationships with each other. They also have different relationships to monster hunting. Our narrator's Indy, and he hates it...

Amanda: [09:37](#) So much.

Danielle: [09:39](#) Belleza sees it as her duty because she wants to figure out what happened to her parents and you know, revenge for their possible deaths or to get them back if they're not dead. Um, so she's kind of going through that by the route of killing things. Oh. So in that sense, the monsters kind of are a symbol for her anger. And then Oscar is like strangely pro at this whole thing. Even though he's, you know, 12 going on 13 Indy says (reads) "Oscar is a real Sic at heart." Like Sicario. (reads) "Oscar's a real Sic at heart. Always will be. He's got salt for blood." Nice little title drop there.

Amanda: [10:18](#) There's a lot of title drops in this book.

Danielle: [10:19](#) It's the word salt?

Amanda: [10:21](#) That's the advantage of having a one word title.

Danielle: [10:23](#) No, but I think that this is like it. This is like this, the one, this is the title moment salt for blood. (music) 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 Salt and dig a little deeper.

Ad Break: [10:55](#) Hi Friends. Are you sitting there thinking, "this podcast does amazing!"? Well, here's how to support us and our authors: preorder our book choices through our Amazon affiliate links. We'll get a small kickback and preorders count towards the author's first week totals. Everybody wins. Next week we're going to discuss Empress of All Seasons by Emiko Jean. If you'd like to help us keep bringing you great content, preorder through the link in our show notes. Happy reading!

Amanda: [11:31](#) Welcome back y'all. It's time for Things We Like a Latte. Danielle, what's your choice this week?

Danielle: [11:36](#) Well, Amanda,

Amanda: [11:37](#) Well, Danielle.

Danielle: [11:38](#) So we've been watching Adam Ruins Everything which is now on Netflix and this was of course a show that you introduced me to, but being able to watch more of it and especially having Adam ruin... Like opposed to an eight-minute youtube video, which is one of the segments... We now get the entire episode, which is three, you know, seven to eight minutes segments about one central thing. Like Adam ruins bathrooms! Or Adam ruins airports! Or Adam ruins cars! And I really like the show because it is kind of a thoughtful critique on the systems that we have in place and the habits that we have as a society and as a culture. And it's still funny.

Amanda: [12:24](#) Yeah, I think it's a great show. One episode specifically that I would like to shout out is the Adam Ruins Immigration. It is really great. It's a great primer on how our current immigration system is super broken and a spoiler alert: The wall is

not going to help. So it's really excellent. I recommend it and to show it to all your friends who are like, "we got to build a wall!" They're probably not great friends with you, but....

- Danielle: [12:49](#) Or all of your friends that are like airport security keeps us safe!" That's what friends sound like. How about you Amanda? What's your brew of choice this week?
- Amanda: [13:01](#) I just read a book that is so good. It is called What You're Getting Wrong about Appalachia by Elizabeth Kate and she just deconstructs this whole idea that Appalachia is singularly white, that singularly poor, that they consistently like vote against their own interests and all these kinds of things and she talks a lot about the history of really radical labor union work that has happened in Appalachia for hundreds of years and I just really, really loved this book. I thought it was great. Especially anybody who has read Hillbilly Elegy should definitely read this book. What You're Getting Wrong about Appalachia by Elizabeth Kate.
- Danielle: [13:41](#) We're going to take a quick break and when we come back, we'll return to our discussion on Salt. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep it touch on instagram and twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back.
- music: [13:58](#) (music)
- Amanda: [14:11](#) Welcome back to the YA Cafe. We're continuing our discussion on Salt. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.
- Danielle: [14:18](#) Spoilers! (and pirates!)
- Amanda: [14:19](#) She was so mad after Lady's Guide that she didn't say "and pirates!" because there were pirates.
- Danielle: [14:27](#) But there are pirates in this book.
- Amanda: [14:30](#) True facts. Just one. Just the one though.
- Danielle: [14:32](#) So in this book we have a pirate Hura and Indy meets Hura like when they arrive somewhere, it doesn't matter. Basically he sees her the first time he feels a connection, like a love connection, but like, hey, someone else my own age who is in this very strange life and Hura seems to know about the monsters and everything goes well until she robbed them blind.
- Amanda: [14:58](#) She does.
- Danielle: [14:59](#) And it was a really cool moment. I liked the added tension that put between Indy and Bella. Yeah, like it was Indy who let a pirate rob them because he's like the one that made the connection with her or whatever. And so Belleza was like, "it's your fault!" But really I think the point here was not that he opened the door and let it happen, but how they handled that stress together.

Amanda: [15:25](#) Right.

Danielle: [15:26](#) And like, while we're here talking about Hura who I thought was a great character, my favorite part of this novel, like she helped them fight the monster at the end and Dah, Dah, Dah, and she like really put her life on the line and then the next morning she had robbed them again!

Amanda: [15:47](#) That was enjoyable.

Danielle: [15:48](#) I love that she robbed them after fighting the big bad.

Amanda: [15:53](#) She's staying in character, you know?

Danielle: [15:55](#) Yeah. Like I love that she didn't like turn around and be a reformed pirate. Like, nope, she's still going to get it done.

Amanda: [16:03](#) Yeah. I liked that too, especially after the fight because I thought that that final fight was probably the weakest part of the novel for me. Like with the big monster that they had been hunting and then like it was hard to tell what was going on. I don't know if you felt that also.

Danielle: [16:17](#) Yeah. But I mean, I, I don't know. I didn't care like we were talking about in the first half you're there for the families. So it doesn't really matter. What matters is that Indy shows up to save them.

Amanda: [16:29](#) Yeah. No, I agree that that is what matters more. I just, uh, you know, I like ... I like seeing the fight sometimes. I felt like we didn't quite see how it all ended.

Danielle: [16:40](#) Yeah, I was super psyched. One of the reasons in the first half that I said that this book was not as dark as some of her other books. Like I expected a kid to die, didn't know if it was going to be Oscar or Zulu, but like I expected someone to die.

Amanda: [16:55](#) I would have been real bad sad if Zulu died.

Danielle: [16:57](#) So that's why I thought that Hannah would kill Zulu. Like Hannah is a breaker of chains and a breaker of hearts, but not this time.

Amanda: [17:05](#) Not this time.

Danielle: [17:07](#) No one died!

Amanda: [17:08](#) They get to go play soccer at the end.

Danielle: [17:09](#) Yeah. So I guess it's not fair to say like no one died. They do discover that their parents are legit dead.

Amanda: [17:16](#) And I liked that too, that their parents died in a very mundane way.

- Danielle: [17:21](#) Yeah. I really liked the trope where their lives are so supernatural and they face these dangers everyday and then it's something really mundane that takes them down.
- Amanda: [17:30](#) Yeah, they just like ran aground or something, right?
- Danielle: [17:33](#) Yeah.
- Amanda: [17:34](#) See, this is why we need good coastguards. That's the takeaway from this novel.
- Danielle: [17:38](#) That's the whole thing. So one of the things that I really wanted to talk about that we didn't get to in the first section, there's a really good use of language in this novel.
- Amanda: [17:50](#) Yes. I knew you were going to love that.
- Danielle: [17:52](#) Yeah. Like so I think that Hannah really went a long way in conceptualizing what these kids' lives would really look like if they had been raised on the open sea by parents who were often absent, like on missions or whatever. And so Belleza, she had two years on land. They put a lot of work into schooling her and teaching her like, you know, a whole language and the rest of the kids sort of speak a mix of Spanish and Portuguese and a little bit of Greek and a little bit of Turkish and there's this great moment when they're in Ukraine and they need to get a book and the book is in English because they don't speak Ukrainian. They don't speak English. So they have to buy a Spanish-English dictionary so that they can at least get to something that they know a little bit of to get to English to understand the Ukrainian guidebook. Like I love it.
- Amanda: [18:52](#) Yeah, I liked that a lot too.
- Danielle: [18:54](#) I mean an Indy feels like a lot of burden placed on him to educate Oscar and Zulu. Um, he feels like Belleza, even though she's making all the decisions doesn't really value their education or a future in which they are not monster hunters.
- Amanda: [19:12](#) I think that's the key of it. Like that is why Indy wants them to be educated so they have this choice whereas Belleza doesn't care if they have the choice. In her mind there isn't a choice. This is what we do.
- Danielle: [19:24](#) Absolutely. And you know, indie feels like he's the glue in his family. He says "I'm sick of the significance and the rhythm and the pacing of everything. Sick of having to steer my thoughts and my family, like a sail." Like he feels that if it were up to Belleza they would be adrift.
- Amanda: [19:43](#) I think that all of Indy's opinion with that made it more heartbreaking when he does decide to leave the family and like stay on land and Oscar and Zulu just kind of roll with it. He assumed that they would come with him, come with him or at the very least be utterly heartbroken and distraught, but they're both like, fine, you do you then. And I think that's a really hard because all of us probably

inflate our own importance in whatever family or triber thing we're in and it's sort of like the opposite of It's a Wonderful Life.

- Danielle: [20:19](#) Yeah. And I think that it's also like, it's a really interesting writing move strategically because like is it really enough of an obstacle or enough of a sacrifice for Indy to leave the water if his two younger siblings come with him? No, I think he really had to like make the choice despite leaving them too, because he was at odds with Belleza. So like he obviously didn't anticipate her dropping the quest for revenge or whatever.
- Amanda: [20:51](#) Right. But it still would have been a sacrifice even if he had just had to leave Belleza, like they, we don't see it as much in the novel, but he references a lot how close he and Belleza used to be. Like they were the two who grew up together getting left behind by their parents and they're pretty close to the same age. So they were already very close.
- Danielle: [21:13](#) Yeah. And he mentions the codependency. One of the things I really like about Hannah's writing is that mental health is always present in such a careful way. Like it's not always like the plot or it's not always the goal or the moral of the story, but it's always there and it's something that is very real for the characters. And so like Indie knows that he has this codependency and he, he does miss how they were before their parents died. He recognizes that if he does walk away and then afterwards reflects when he did walk away, that he's suffering because that's his day to day world is so wrapped up in these people and he does not know who he is outside of them.
- Amanda: [21:59](#) Yeah, I definitely agree. So the end of the book winds up with them finding their parents' treasure after they're like adrift at sea because Hura has robbed them again
- Danielle: [22:09](#) Every good Monster Book has a treasure, right?
- Amanda: [22:12](#) Well at the very least every good piratey book or seafaring book, right?
- Danielle: [22:16](#) Yeah. So we have a treasure.
- Amanda: [22:18](#) There's a treasure! And that's actually what killed their parents was trying to go find this treasure. How did you feel about that? How that played out?
- Danielle: [22:24](#) So the treasure ends up being like this property on an island, like just a little house on an island with a few people and it was precious.
- Amanda: [22:37](#) Like it was very sweet.
- Danielle: [22:38](#) Like the thing that I thought was funny about that is that their parents had definitely like played up like "oh you have a treasure waiting for you!" And of course if you say that to kids like they're going to imagine like and jewels and like bounty, but (high voice) "a true treasure is a home and people to share it with."

Amanda: [22:58](#) Yeah. I thought it was really sweet. It was very sweet for the end of this novel.

Danielle: [23:04](#) But saccharine.

Amanda: [23:04](#) I'm not going to say it was "saccharine." It was a little on the edge though, like somewhere in between the sweet-saccharine spectrum.

Danielle: [23:11](#) Yeah. Overall, I really liked this book. I thought it was a fun read. I think it fits very well in the Hannah Moskowitz section of our library.

Amanda: [23:19](#) It's a pretty big section at this point, so...

Danielle: [23:21](#) Yeah, and so you should definitely check out this book and then go back and check out Hannah's other titles. That's our show for today. Friends, you can find us on instagram and twitter at @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you and if you're enjoying the show, leave us a review on itunes. Happy reading.