

**YA Café Podcast**  
**Episode 50: Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal**  
**04 April 2019**

Amanda Thrasher: 00:00 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 No Normal, Ms. Marvel Volume One by G. Willow Wilson. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:16 Welcome, y'all. As always, our first segment we will be spoiler free. So you can stick around even if you haven't checked out this comic book yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.

Danielle Hall: 00:28 And I'm Danielle Hall, an eight and ninth grade English teacher, and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](http://teachnouvelle.com). Hey, Amanda.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:35 Hey, Danielle.

Danielle Hall: 00:36 It's our 50th episode.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:39 What?!

Danielle Hall: 00:40 Yeah.

Amanda Thrasher: 00:41 I had no idea! That's exciting! Oh, my gosh. We've read so many things.

Danielle Hall: 00:45 We have read so many things, and it's kind of cool that this is our 50th episode because of course this comic book came out before we had a podcast, but I feel like it was such a significant read in terms of like, "Wow, we need so many awesome diverse stories in our lives, and this is exactly what we've been waiting for," except that that was two years ago. So it's cool to be able to talk about it now.

Amanda Thrasher: 01:14 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 01:15 So we're talking about it now or a few reasons, but we do have superheroes on the brain. So there's of course the Captain Marvel movie out, which is a different superhero, but related, involved.

Amanda Thrasher: 01:30 Yes. We can go into that more.

Danielle Hall: 01:33 We will go into that more. The Avengers End Game movie is coming out soon, and that's also part of this universe. And I recently wrote a blog post advocating for incorporating superhero stories into the American Literature Curriculum.

Amanda Thrasher: 01:51 That is the hype release of the summer.

Danielle Hall: 01:52 \*laughter\*

Amanda Thrasher: 01:52 It's not Avenger's Endgame. It's the TeachNouvelle Blog. Teaching superheroes.

Danielle Hall: 01:58 No, I think it's a really cool opportunity to teach about the American dream and American identity through superheroes. So Ms. Marvel just fits.

Amanda Thrasher: 02:08 Definitely. Kamala Khan is your average Pakistani American teenager living in Jersey City. She feels her parent's expectations of her are too strict when she's shown them time and time again that she's a good trustworthy daughter. When she decided to ignore their wishes and sneak out to a party, she and the other party goers are enveloped in a strange green mist. Kamala finds herself with new, unruly transmorphic powers. Can she use her powers to emulate her favorite superheroes fighting for justice and good to prevail? Will her parents find out and ground her forever?

Danielle Hall: 02:37 Dun dun dun. \*laughter\* Okay, so yeah. I know it's a little bit silly. I wrote it to be silly, but I wanted to underscore the fact that like Peter Parker, she has this additional complication to being a superhero, which is that she lives in her parent's house and has to play by the rules.

Amanda Thrasher: 02:57 Well, I think it's great because it's a really good, lighthearted comic book. There's some very serious comic books with very serious, weighty, justice blah blah blahs, and that is not Kamala Khan. Kamala Khan is just here to nerd out over her favorite superheroes and ...

Danielle Hall: 03:13 She writes fanfic.

Amanda Thrasher: 03:14 She writes fanfic. She tries to do the right thing. She's wonderful. She is such a breath of fresh air, especially I think if you are in the comic space where we're in now where the Marvel movies, some of them are super serious, like Avengers Infinity War was really dark. All the DC movies tend to be very dark. Then you've got Kamala who is kicking around just being just this bright, shining force for good. I think that she's really good. I think that anybody who likes Spiderman Homecoming would love No Normal.

Danielle Hall: 03:48 Yes. Absolutely. So G. Willow Wilson calls Kamala Khan a paladin type. So the quest for good is black and white. That's the nobility drive there, except that of course good and evil exist on a gray spectrum in the world and the world is complex and it's interesting to have a teenager taking on that fight, because teenagers are already learning to live in a gray world and developing their sense of right and wrong and justice. So it's like ... it's such a cool thing to have a teenage superhero. I think that that is just so perfect. And you are right that the tenor of Kamala Khan really reminded me of Spiderman Homecoming, and that is where I want to live with my superheroes, right in that little squishy place.

Amanda Thrasher: 04:40 Yeah, I mean, they can have their Dark Knight brooding around, \*laughter\* and Kamala can just be shiny.

Danielle Hall: 04:47 Yes. So we start with her normal life, right? This is No Normal. So eventually her normal goes away, but at the beginning we have her normal life. She has a great family. Her family is Pakistani American and Muslim. She has a brother, Amir, who is very devout and her father says that Amir is very devout in order to avoid getting a job. \*laughter\* And I thought that was very funny. You know, Muslims aren't monolithic like, (they) have varying levels of religiosity.

Amanda Thrasher: 05:23 And we see that not only from Kamala's brother but also her friends. Like her best friend is also Muslim and she wears the hijab and Kamala doesn't, but she still keeps Halal, but she doesn't want to because she stands there and smells the bacon desperately. \*laughter\* But all that is at the beginning of the story where Kamala is still trying to figure out how her identity fits into her life, like how she can be the normal American teenager that she feels like she is while also having, she says,

like weird holidays and this weird religious family and trying to be just a normal girl from Jersey City while dealing with trying to pinpoint her identity and who she is.

Amanda Thrasher: 06:04 So her powers figure into that perfectly because it's the shape shifting abilities that she has.

Danielle Hall: 06:11 OOooooooh! Her powers are a metaphor.

Amanda Thrasher: 06:14 All superpowers are a metaphor, Dani. Get on board.

Danielle Hall: 06:18 And she is teased by the popular girl for smelling like curry and like she just wants to wear a bikini. So she is in an identity crisis at the beginning, trying to find herself, and instead finds some new superpowers, which we can go into in the spoiler section.

Danielle Hall: 06:42 Before we leave the idea of her family and her cultural heritage, I did want to acknowledge that I loved the presentation of Urdu in these panels. So her family does some code switching and they use Urdu in and out of their English, and the translations are kind of in Kamala's voice. They'll say things like, "She calls me that sometimes. It means 'darling daughter'," or whatever, and it's in a box in the lower part of the panel, and I thought that that was really well done because I imagine it was unobtrusive for Urdu speakers, and it was unobtrusive for me, too. But I still had the explanatory comma if I needed it.

Amanda Thrasher: 07:29 Yeah, I also liked the way that the poetry was in there. It was in there in the original language and then it was also in there in the English version in the moment when she's having her transformative vision or whatever. So similar kind of thing. It was seamless how it was in there like it was honoring its original form and giving a way for English speaking audience to experience it, too.

Danielle Hall: 07:52 Yeah. Man, I just really enjoyed this. Okay, so for our listeners, between the two of us, Amanda is a comic book - what word would you like here Amanda?

Amanda Thrasher: 08:04 Something less than fan but more than casual reader I would say. It's hard to feel like you're a comic book fan because there is just so much and like ...

Danielle Hall: 08:15 Right.

Amanda Thrasher: 08:15 Like I have read some comic books that followed some story lines that it is a big big world.

Danielle Hall: 08:21 Of the two of us, she is more informed, more knowledgeable, and nerdier.

Amanda Thrasher: 08:29 Thanks.

Danielle Hall: 08:31 But I like this and I like art. I loved this artwork here, which was by Adrian Alphona, and I'm not a guru, but I was kind of learning on the job how to read a comic book, and there was this one page which is so beautiful, I'm not going to go full spoilers here. I'm just going to describe this page. Kamala is climbing up into the next portion of the building and there is quite an adventurous climb involved. So on the left page, of course you read top to bottom on the left page, and then she starts climbing at the bottom of the right hand page and when you look at the page, there's like six Kamalas and several speech bubbles because there's someone else on the page with her, but she is climbing up so that you end on the upper right hand corner because you've just climbed with her. I just thought that that was such an adventurous way to read and I really enjoyed that a lot. I think that students will appreciate that, too. It's kind of like a fun out of the box-y thing.

Amanda Thrasher: 09:50 Yeah, I think that it's great to give kids the chance to see ways that you can play around with form and ways that you can use language to communicate in ways that go outside of the specific grammar rules that all the kids have to learn, and the specific, "This is how books look." I think that comic books are a really great avenue to push the boundaries of society and push the boundaries of language communication and story.

Danielle Hall: 10:12 Yes.

Amanda Thrasher: 10:13 So even if you're not a big comics person, this one is definitely worth checking out, even if you don't feel like comics are for you, Kamala Khan is probably for you. She's outstanding.

Danielle Hall: 10:22 Yeah. 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 Ms. Marvel and dig a little deeper.

Danielle Hall: 10:42 Hey, friends. We need your support to keep making this podcast happen. One easy way to show your love is to order our book choices through our affiliate links. Up next, we'll be discussing *In the Key of Nira Ghani* by Natasha Deen. Order this book through the link in our show notes and help us keep bringing you great content. Happy reading.

Amanda Thrasher: 11:02 Welcome back, y'all. It's time for Things We Like a Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?

Danielle Hall: 11:15 So in addition to not being a huge comic book person, I like the movies, but haven't read a lot of comic books, I am kind of ashamed to say that I'm not a big reader of non-fiction, but I do have this goal this year to read 20 non-fiction titles. So I finished *Radium Girls* by Kate Moore and I loved it. I think that part of my problem with non-fiction previously has been like a narrative voice that feels disconnected from historical characters. So it doesn't treat them like characters. It treats them like names on a page or whatever, and in *Radium Girls*, Kate Moore was really focused on telling the story of these girls who painted dials with radium paint during World War I, and of course got radium poisoning and died horrific deaths. She really humanized this story for me, and I learned a lot and I really enjoyed it, and it was kind of suspenseful because of course we have modern knowledge that radium will kill you horrifically. These girls are like painting their nails and putting it on their teeth to go out on the town and I'm like, "No!"

Danielle Hall: 12:37 Anyway, *Radium Girls* by Kate Moore. Strongly recommend. How about you Amanda? What's your brew of choice?

Amanda Thrasher: 12:45 Well, I went to see *Us* this weekend, the new Jordan Peele movie. It was good, but I loved the soundtrack. The soundtrack to this movie is amazing. It's composed by Michael Abels, who is the same person who composed for *Get Out*.

Danielle Hall: 13:00 Which was really great.

Amanda Thrasher: 13:02 Yeah, like very atmospheric, added a lot to the movie, and I think that the soundtrack to this one is better. The way that he composed it is different than many movies because he actually got the script and had been working on some of the composition before they even started shooting because Jordan Peele wanted to have some of the themes in his mind. He did some really incredible things with Hip Hop songs and making them thematically tie into the whole movie and making it like

super creepy. So expertly done. If you like music, even if you don't like scary movies, I recommend listening to ...

Danielle Hall: 13:33 That's me.

Amanda Thrasher: 13:34 That's Danielle. I definitely recommend listening to at least a few of the tracks from the Us soundtrack, because it really is a force. I'm really impressed by the soundtrack.

Danielle Hall: 13:45 Well, I am excited to check that out because I will not be seeing the movie.

Amanda Thrasher: 13:50 Chicken. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 13:53 We are going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll return to our discussion on Ms. Marvel. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:25 Welcome back, y'all, to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on No Normal, Ms. Marvel Volume One by G. Willow Wilson. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle Hall: 14:35 Spoilers!

Amanda Thrasher: 14:37 Yeah.

Danielle Hall: 14:38 And robots.

Amanda Thrasher: 14:40 Yeah. So in the spoiler section, we wanted to talk some about her powers and how this originally manifests in the way that she has these questions about her identity when she first gets powers, the person that comes to her mind as being a superhero of course is Captain Marvel, who is the superhero-iest of the superheroes. Carol Danvers has been saving New York all the time and she

is one of the most powerful people in the Marvel Universe. So this is who Kamala turns into. She looks like Captain Marvel when she first gets hit by the terrigen mist.

Danielle Hall: 15:18 Yeah, and at the beginning, she can change into other people, but not so much control what goes on with herself. She's got a practice montage-y thing happening, and her first act is to save the popular girl who only moderately needs saving, whatever, but it's a cool thing so she's got these powers.

Danielle Hall: 15:44 Then she meets her nemesis.

Amanda Thrasher: 15:47 Dun dun dun. Got to have a good nemesis.

Danielle Hall: 15:49 The Inventor was super creepy. He's like a bird guy.

Amanda Thrasher: 15:54 No, the bird guy wasn't the Inventor. The bird guy was just Thomas Edison. He was just a clone.

Danielle Hall: 15:58 He's the one that talks to her all the time.

Amanda Thrasher: 16:01 Yeah, he is, but he is not her arch nemesis. He escapes at the end.

Danielle Hall: 16:06 Oh, yeah. Okay.

Amanda Thrasher: 16:08 You can't beat your arch nemesis in his first appearance, Dani. \*laughter\* That's not how nemeses work.

Danielle Hall: 16:13 Whatever. \*laughter\* Okay. It was clear to me that even if I misclassified who the inventor was, it was clear to me that her first, her baby bad was the bird guy. Is that fair to say?



Amanda Thrasher: 16:31 Yes.

Danielle Hall: 16:31 Then the Inventor is the big bad who's gonna take multiple seasons or whatever you call them in the comic book world, to fight. I get it. Baby bad, big bad.

Amanda Thrasher: 16:43 Yeah, okay, yeah. Baby bad, big bad. Yeah. So the bird is the baby bad, and he's a good creepy villain. I think it was a little on the nose with the whole like, "They think that teenagers are expendable, but we're not." But I'm willing to give it a pass because there was so much other good stuff going on.

Danielle Hall: 17:02 Yeah. I liked the creep factor of kids disappearing. I liked seeing them suspended in the goo having their energy and life force drained from them. I agree it was a bit like on the nose that they're worthless and this is the only way they can prove their worth or whatever, but I liked that it ended up that they had volunteered to have their life force drained from them instead of like they had been kidnapped. I thought that was a good twist, and I think that G. Willow Wilson has in her mind this kind of apocalyptic foreboding that millennials and Gen Y face with climate change and things like that. So I liked that aspect. Not sure so many kids would volunteer to die to be a battery.

Amanda Thrasher: 17:57 Yeah, probably not. But then they rise up at the end. They just needed someone to believe in them.

Danielle Hall: 18:05 Yeah.

Amanda Thrasher: 18:06 I want to talk about Lockjaw.

Danielle Hall: 18:08 Puppy!

Amanda Thrasher: 18:11 Puppy. So Lockjaw is a massive teleporting dog with a tuning fork on its head for some reason, and she acquires him because he's working for Queen Medusa, who is the ruler of the Inhumans who

Danielle Hall: 18:25 Blah blah blah blah. None of this is important.

Amanda Thrasher: 18:31 \*laughter\* It's all important, Dani. It ties into important things in the overall universe.

Danielle Hall: 18:36 I am here to help us focus. The puppy.

Amanda Thrasher: 18:39 So Lockjaw is a puppy sent by Queen Medusa to watch Kamala Khan because she's clearly not gonna go hang out with the Inhumans. But I love how his very first appearance this enormous dog appears with a bow on it and a sign that says, "I like hugs," and Kamala is immediately like, "This is my dog. I love it forever. It's perfect."

Danielle Hall: 19:01 Yes, and that is another moment where I thought the art was particularly beautiful because you have kind of like Kamala's perspective, Lockjaw bounding towards her in progressive frames, and then her looking up at him, cuddling him. I loved it. And I liked his integration into her house because of course her parents are like, "You must keep the dog outside," and she's like, "I definitely will keep the dog outside," and the dog can teleport. So the dog's like, "I'm not staying outside."

Danielle Hall: 19:33 There's this part where her dad is like simultaneously scolding the dog for being inside and petting it. It reminded me of you because whenever Padfoot does something bad, you cannot keep a straight face and you just ...

Amanda Thrasher: 19:50 It is not my fault. He is too cute, and I'm powerless, and I won't apologize. But yeah, you mention there's a lot of great humor throughout these books, just like in the frames. There's all kind of little jokes hidden in the background, which I caught more on the second read, reading it this time than the first time. It just really helps set the tone of this is a fun thing, we're having a fun time. We're learning about ourselves and getting powers and saving the world. I'm here for it.

Danielle Hall: 20:15 Yeah. Absolutely. So we have some of the typical identity stuff that happens. I love when her parents get a sense that she is not being entirely truthful with them, they send her to the leader Sheikh Abdullah, and Kamala is like, "I don't want to go. He's the worst. He's just gonna lecture me." Then he doesn't and he says, "If you insist on pursuing this thing you will not tell me about, do it with courage, strength, honor, compassion and self respect." Also, he advises her to get a mentor and he reminds her that when the student is ready, a master will appear. So that is an awesome encounter.

Danielle Hall: 21:04 And then ...

Amanda Thrasher: 21:05 Then Wolverine shows up.

Danielle Hall: 21:06 Yes. I love this for so many reasons. Wolverine is funny. Like except in the movie Logan. That is actually a heart wrenching movie, but other than that, Wolverine is funny, and Kamala is a total fan girl. She's written fic about him and she's like, "It was the second most up-voted," and he was like, "What was the first?" He totally buys into her world, but he's also cynical and jaded and grumpy and hungry and whatever. He is such a great juxtaposition for all of the things that you said earlier that Kamala is, right? She's like a bright and shining light and Wolverine is like grumpy.

Amanda Thrasher: 21:51 Yeah, he's really playing up the grumpy old man-ness in this appearance.

Danielle Hall: 21:55 Yeah, but he is a mentor to her, and she has these moments where she's afraid to do things and she hesitates and she's like, "But isn't it gonna hurt?" And he says, "Yeah, it hurts. It always hurts. You just gotta trust yourself to come through it." So he's giving her some sage advice. Then they beat up an alligator together.

Amanda Thrasher: 22:19 A giant alligator.

Danielle Hall: 22:22 Yeah, those are some cool panels, too, fighting the giant alligator. Crocodile? Alligator?

Amanda Thrasher: 22:28 I'm pretty sure it was an alligator.

Danielle Hall: 22:29 It's been "invented" so I guess it could be whatever.

Amanda Thrasher: 22:34 It was an alligator. Crocodiles have longer snouts.

Danielle Hall: 22:38 This is part robot and you're like, "Oh, no. The snout size is what makes it ..."

Amanda Thrasher: 22:42 Yeah, the snout size is how you determine an alligator from a crocodile. God, get it together. \*laughter\*

Danielle Hall: 22:49 Then finally at the end, Kamala starts coming into her own and she gets her good hero moralizing in, and she says to the inventor, "A hero is just somebody who tries to do the right thing, even when it's hard. There are more of us than you think."

Amanda Thrasher: 23:07 Great job, Kamala.

Danielle Hall: 23:09 She's so great.

Amanda Thrasher: 23:10 She is so great. I really hope that they put her in the Marvel cinematic universe somewhere. I was wondering if they were leading up to it because they put the Inhumans in agents of shield, the show. I want her to get her own movie. I want her to have her own thing going on.

Danielle Hall: 23:25 I would definitely love to see that. We don't often call out blog posts right in our episodes, but I do want to remind y'all that I did write a blog post, a pretty epic one. Epic, eh?

Amanda Thrasher: 23:40 Ahhhhh.

Danielle Hall: 23:43 About using superheroes in American literature, and in that, I discuss a lot of different ideas and resources to get you started. So after you listen to this, go read that. You can find the link in our show notes.

Danielle Hall: 23:58 That's our show for today, friends. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you. Don't forget, next week we're reading In the Key of Nira Ghani by Natasha Deen. Grab this book through the affiliate link in our show notes. If you're enjoying the show, leave us a review on iTunes. Happy reading!