

**YA Café Podcast**  
**Episode 65: Sick Kids in Love**  
**21 November 2019**

- Danielle: 00:00 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 Sick Kids In Love by Hannah Moskowitz. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends and let's talk books.
- Amanda: 00:21 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: 00:29 And I'm Danielle Hall, an eighth and ninth grade English teacher and I blog at [teachnouvelle.com](http://teachnouvelle.com).
- Amanda: 00:35 Isabel is sick, not Make-a-Wish sick though, Isabel has rheumatoid arthritis, the kind of sick that hurts her every single day and requires constant treatments, but isn't going to kill her. Her friends and family, although they care about her, sometimes forget that she's sick at all. After all, Isabel is dealing with it so well and works hard to never be an imposition on their lives.
- Amanda: 00:54 Sasha's world is different. He's sick too with Gaucher disease, but he and his family are open and unapologetic about his life and his struggles. When the two meet during a transfusion, it's charming, it's sweet, and it completely upends Isabel's life. Oh, and no spoilers, nobody dies in this one.
- Danielle: 01:11 That's the tagline to the book. It's right on the cover, that they don't die in this one. And I have things I want to say about that, but first...
- Amanda: 01:20 But first.
- Danielle: 01:20 Let's talk about Hannah.
- Amanda: 01:22 We do love Hannah.

Danielle: 01:23 Yeah. Okay. So full disclosure...

Amanda: 01:24 I'm friends with Hannah, have been for a long time. She's been on the podcast, which was a lot of fun.

Danielle: 01:30 Yeah, she was in our year-end roundup and she told us secrets about the publishing industry.

Amanda: 01:35 The "hot goss" as it were.

Danielle: 01:37 The hot goss. \*laughter\* We did her book Salt on the podcast and we have been fans of her forever. She published her first book at 17, so major props to her. One of Hannah's books, History of Glitter and Blood was the very first ARC I ever received.

Amanda: 01:55 D'aaawwww!

Danielle: 01:55 I know. Yeah. We loved her book Invincible Summer. And I was thinking about this, and when last we saw Hannah, which was in Baltimore last October, she said, "I have a book coming out, Sick Kids In Love.", and we talked about "sick kid lit" with Hannah. This is an #OwnVoices novel. That's not a spoiler either, that says it right on the cover, I'm not outing anybody without their permission. But Hannah basically wrote this in response to some other popular novels where it's pretty obvious pretty quickly that the book is not for sick kids or worse, it isn't obvious until the very end.

Amanda: 02:45 Yeah.

Danielle: 02:45 And then you're devastated.

Amanda: 02:47 Not to name any specific names here.

Danielle: 02:49 No, let's name some specific names. Like, *The Fault in Our Stars* was a worldwide phenomenon, but how could you say that that was written for sick kids? I mean not like, "How could you say, Amanda, that it was written for sick kids?" because I don't think you would ever say that. But it was voyeuristic in the way that we looked in on this trauma and then *Everything, Everything*.

Amanda: 03:13 *Everything, Everything* is the one that makes me ragey you, but we can't talk about why it makes me ragey you without spoiling it.

Danielle: 03:18 I mean these are spoilers. That's the thing. But like...

Danielle: 03:21 Anyway, you come down to books that are about sick kids but not for sick kids, and books that are for sick kids and about sick kids. And then you have like the trifecta, which Hannah has said "by, for, and about" and that is the magic of #OwnVoices.

Danielle: 03:43 Then while we're here, because I know we reprized our sick kids conversation in our episode on *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them* and I just wanted to like underscore that we did a podcast episode on another book, *Lovely, Dark and Deep* by Justina Chen, recommended for all.

Amanda: 04:02 Yes.

Danielle: 04:02 Which is for sick kids.

Danielle: 04:06 All right, that was a lot.

Amanda: 04:07 It was a lot.

Danielle: 04:08 I just needed to get it all out there. \*laughter\*

Amanda: 04:11 But we're not talking about those books. We're talking about this great book, which I'm going to guess that I kind of know what you're going to say, but Dani, did you like this book?

Danielle: 04:18 Yes, Amanda. I did. \*laughter\* I feel like I just went on for like 10 minutes. I mean, I could see the timer. It hasn't been 10 minutes, but like, yeah, I enjoyed this book. It was very squishy, but I did have this feeling, which is the whole thing, right? That this book wasn't written for me and that was really incredible. Like, I wasn't in on all the jokes and that's okay.

Amanda: 04:43 Yeah, I mean I loved it. I thought that it was such a nice, sweet love story that had very little conflict. I was thinking about what's in this spoiler section, what's in the non spoiler section? Like "well."

Danielle: 04:56 And that's okay.

Amanda: 04:56 And it was great. So they fall in love. I don't know if you could pick up on that with some skilled detective work.

Danielle: 05:03 It's right in the title-

Amanda: 05:04 Right in the name.

Danielle: 05:05 ... Sick Kids in Love.

Danielle: 05:07 The publisher also sent us... This was so cute and saccharin, and that's okay. They sent us a marketing box of Sweethearts. That's what they're called, right?

Amanda: 05:20 Oh, yeah, yeah the-

Amanda: 05:21 Candy hearts with like Isa and Sasha and different things on them.

- Amanda: 05:28 It was very cute. Totally inedible candy, \*laughter\* but they're very cute.
- Amanda: 05:35 So, as we mentioned that there's not a lot, a lot of conflict in here. There is some that we'll talk some about, but overall like this is just a really wonderful, sweet story of these two characters who meet and flirt and fall in love and then they have some mild problems and then they get back together. You know, it hits all the right beats, but the way that it does it is such a good trip.
- Amanda: 05:56 I really liked how both of these characters developed as we got to know them. I liked everything about Isabel's character. She felt very realized, like fully formed.
- Amanda: 06:06 One of the things that she does is she has this sort of reverse advice column that she writes for the newspaper. But she doesn't do so much writing about it, as asking people questions on random things like "What's your favorite subway line" or "What's your idea of a good time?" And then she'll just type up these answers. I think that that is such a good piece of Isabel's character, who is this person who wants to be no trouble on anyone else's life.
- Danielle: 06:35 That was so deep. I think that this reverse column, like you said, does lend a lot of insight into Isabel because one of the answers that she always writes up, she doesn't ever publish this in her school paper, but she always writes up an answer for this character, named Claire, who is a dead girl. It emerges over the course of the story that Isa that has this like extended back story for Claire. I just think that if you wanted to dig deep on some psychoanalysis of Isabel, the presence of Claire is the place to do it.
- Amanda: 07:17 Yeah. I also think that teenagers just do weird stuff and that's a weird thing. That's a very teenager thing to do. Just invent this dead character who has the loving mom by her side as she dies peacefully. Like, that's a very teenager thing to do.
- Danielle: 07:34 Yes. And one other thing I wanted to point out is that Hannah has an incredible narrative voice. Her writing is very funny. It sounds like things kids would say.
- Amanda: 07:46 She has great dialogue.

Danielle: 07:48 Yeah. And the other thing that's important about these characters in the story is that they are both Jewish and Hannah is Jewish. It's just really nicely done.

Amanda: 07:59 Another thing that really shapes Isabel's character, is her relationship with her father. Which is complicated because it's not bad, he's not a bad father. It's just a little sterile? Would you agree that that's a good word for it?

Danielle: 08:17 Yeah. He's the head surgeon or chief something at the hospital and-

Amanda: 08:22 Chief of Medicine I think.

Danielle: 08:22 He's a bigwig at the hospital. Ostensibly, they spend a lot of time together, but the time that they spend together is like, her eating dinner in his office because he's too busy to come home at a reasonable hour. Their apartment doesn't really have anything in it and her mother is gone.

Amanda: 08:43 Which we don't know a lot about to start with.

Amanda: 08:46 Also one thing that that really should have impacted more than it did was how, in the beginning of Isabel's life, she was trying so hard to find out what was wrong with her and she got blown off by all of these doctors and told like, "Oh, there's nothing wrong with you." "All of your tests look fine." "You shouldn't be sick." "Whatever, nothing's really going on."

Danielle: 09:07 You're saying that her father should have been more supportive of her?

Amanda: 09:09 Yeah, absolutely. Did you not get that vibe?

Danielle: 09:12 Whoa, I wasn't arguing with you.

Amanda: 09:15 But why not? We should argue! \*laughter\*

Danielle: 09:16 No, I was just asking clarifying question.

Amanda: 09:20 Yeah, absolutely. Her father should have been more supportive of her.

Danielle: 09:23 I agree. But I think it emerges pretty quickly that he doesn't want a sick kid. Kind of like how you're in denial about having allergies.

Amanda: 09:32 I don't have allergies. I have a prolonged cold symptom that is unrelated to pollen. And I don't need your sass.

Danielle: 09:45 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 Sick Kids in Love and dig a little deeper.

Danielle: 09:54 Hey friends, as we shared in the last episode, we will be taking a break from producing new episodes in January. We don't have the resources to continue right now. If you'd like to see us back in your feed, please consider supporting this podcast through our Patreon link in show notes or by ordering our book choices through our affiliate links. Happy reading!

Amanda: 10:34 Welcome back y'all. It's time for Things We Like A Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?

Danielle: 10:39 I am so excited to tell you.

Amanda: 10:41 I think I know.

Danielle: 10:44 It's like we're married or something. Okay, so I cannot even remember what episode we mentioned it in, but we had Amanda K. Morgan on the podcast. It seems like forever ago. It was at least a year ago. We announced that we had embarked on a new series of digital adventure games

for reluctant readers. Well, as of this week, like a year and a half later, we have finished Burnbridge Breakouts.

Amanda: 11:12 Wooooo!

Danielle: 11:14 I know. So these are basically escape rooms mixed with a reading adventure and aspects of a point-and-click RPG in there. It's a whole thing. Definitely check it out and you can play the first game for free.

Amanda: 11:33 That's my favorite price.

Danielle: 11:36 \*laughter\* How about you Amanda? What's your brew of choice?

Amanda: 11:38 Well, congratulations on finishing Burnbridge to you and Mandy Morgan who is probably listening, like decent odds. I'm just really proud of both you guys and you did great stuff and I'm really happy that that's in the universe.

Danielle: 11:51 And over.

Amanda: 11:53 And over. \*laughter\* Because it's taken up a lot of our lives.

Amanda: 11:58 However, that's not what I Like a Latte this week. I like something else.

Danielle: 12:02 What? She's holding it and everybody needs to know that she's literally holding it.

Amanda: 12:07 She's your audience avatar right now.

Danielle: 12:09 That's right. Okay. What, what do you Like a Latte?



- Amanda: 12:12 This book is a graphic novel by economist Bryan Kaplan and that is drawn by Zach Weinersmith, who is the artist who does the Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal cartoons. It is called *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration*. It is so great. It is such a good, accessible exploration of what open borders would actually look like economically and what it would look like for us as a world and a culture. I just totally loved it. I thought that all the drawings and graphs made it very easy to follow along even though I don't have a lot of economics background.
- Danielle: 12:50 Me too. Like I kind of wished for more books in my life that were like graphic novel economic books.
- Amanda: 12:58 Yeah. Like please teach me economics through graphic novels and history-
- Danielle: 13:03 American history-
- Amanda: 13:04 ... through Broadway musicals.
- Danielle: 13:05 ... through Broadway musicals.
- Danielle: 13:06 I was going to say that this is like the Hamilton of economics.
- Amanda: 13:11 So it's really good. I think that my one, tiny quibble with it, which I would love to talk to y'all about if anybody else has read it, is a lot of times the emphasis on economic growth as a fundamental "good" factor. Especially in this warming world that we live in. I think that that would be an interesting thing to break apart and deconstruct, but it does poke holes in a lot of fear mongering, anti-immigration policies. Which I am always here for. So I think that it's a really fantastic book. Definitely recommend. I think that it's perfect for our classroom. It's called *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration* by Brian Kaplan and Zach Weinersmith.
- Danielle: 13:52 Also, I just want to make another plug for this book here because it has an excellent kind of point-counterpoint structure of argumentation where he like brings in the counterpoints and then refutes them. Love it.

Danielle: 14:07 We're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on Sick Kids in Love. The rest of the show will contain spoilers.

Danielle: 14:14 I mean kind of.

Amanda: 14:16 Kind of. \*laughter\*

Danielle: 14:16 So if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram @yacafepodcast. We'll be back.

Amanda: 14:38 Welcome back y'all to the YA Cafe. We're continuing our discussion on Sick Kids in Love by Hannah Moskowitz. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle: 14:47 Spoilers!

Together: 14:47 Kind of \*laughter\*

Amanda: 14:50 Like we talked about, it's a squishy book. They have some conflict, which arises because they are different people and how will they ever learn to compromise for each other? But they did so very sweetly.

Danielle: 15:02 Also, kind of like the central conflict to the book is that Isa thinks like... I don't know y'all. I'm just going to tell you, from my perspective, what she thinks. She thinks that this disease is going to impact the longevity and quality of her life very quickly and that she is not going to have a great life beyond like 30 or 40 years old. This is her fear.

Amanda: 15:31 I did not get that. What I got from it was that she was not so much worried about the disease, but just worried that like she'd turn out to be kind of a lousy person because everybody else in her family has been such terrible people.

Danielle: 15:45 Right.

Amanda: 15:46 I read that the reason she was so resistant to dating because "sick girl doesn't date" is because like she feared becoming like this bitter old person who was terrible to the people around them.

Danielle: 15:59 Hmm. I think that that is definitely true. That was a concern of hers. But at certain point she talked about like having visions of the future where Sasha and their teenage daughter are eating dinner alone. And I guess, now that I think about it, I was interpreting that as, "and she was dead." But in reality, it might've been what you said. Like she felt that she would have left like her mom left, which we can circle back to in a minute, because she thought she would become this terrible person. So, that's fair.

Amanda: 16:29 Yeah, because I don't think she ever thought that this disease is going to kill her, and had no reason to because it's not a terminal disease. She talks about in the book, Isabel mentions, the long, daily slog of a chronic illness. Like, this is not something that's going to kill her. This is just something that's going to kind of suck for a long time.

Danielle: 16:48 So her mother is gone and for a while I thought that she was dead but you know, I guess that was just my dead-mom-bias coming through.

Amanda: 16:58 You got to watch your dead-mom-bias.

Danielle: 17:01 Well I mean just to jump straight to the spoilers in reality-

Amanda: 17:04 Oh yeah, this is a real spoiler.

Danielle: 17:05 This is a real spoiler. Her mom is alive. Her mom has been out of her life and over the course of the novel Isa realizes that, whereas originally she had really blamed her mom for leaving, she realizes that her dad was a jerk and her parents had a terrible relationship.

- Danielle: 17:24 And there's this like beautiful moment where she's just had a disagreement with Sasha and she's like sitting in her house and looking at all the places in her house and sort of like reliving scenes where her parents had been fighting in front of her in all these different places in the house. She like has this like epiphany that her mom left out of self preservation. And not that her dad was like abusive, but like preservation of freedom and autonomy and the ability to pursue happiness outside of this toxic relationship. So that was cool. And then-
- Amanda: 17:58 Yeah, but she still left like, I mean that's, that's true. So in Veronica Mars there is a thing and I cannot remember the whole context of the conversation where her father's like, "I kind of suck." And Veronica's like "it doesn't matter how much you suck. You're still the one who stayed."
- Danielle: 18:16 I agree. And especially because this is the thing that I just... it just frustrated me so much. She changed her number and changed her name and didn't give Isa that information. I don't get it. I don't get people who abandoned their children.
- Amanda: 18:40 Yeah. But I think that... I mentioned her relationship with her father is super complicated, and I think that this just builds more on this complicated relationship that Isabel in a lot of ways has accepted for a really long time and she has kept like "My dad is a good person, he does the doctor thing, I am a good daughter, I go spend time with my father." But they don't talk about her sickness at all because she's not who he hoped that she would be and they don't talk about her mom at all. I think that like this does a really good job of not like painting her mother as a sympathetic person. Especially when-
- Danielle: 19:16 Oh yeah, this is why I said, "and then" earlier.
- Amanda: 19:19 And then I didn't bite.
- Danielle: 19:20 But it's okay. When what Amanda?
- Amanda: 19:22 And then it winds up that Sasha's dad has been dating Isabel's mother. Dun duh duh duh.

Danielle: 19:30 Meh, I mean it's fine. It's like the most dramatic thing that happens in this book, in terms of-

Amanda: 19:35 It is. It is dramatic!

Danielle: 19:37 But, ike, to be fair, in the book, it really comes across immediately that its not dramatic that it's weird because her mom is dating Sasha's dad, but weird because she hasn't seen her mom in years and then all of a sudden, she finds her making out on the corner.

Amanda: 19:55 Can we talk a little more about Sasha? We haven't talked about him much. I think that he's a really great love interest. Like he's sweet and goofy and-

Danielle: 20:02 He's a fast-talking brunette.

Amanda: 20:04 He's a fast-talking brunette. He would not be out of place on Gilmore Girls.

Danielle: 20:08 I really enjoyed him. He has such a big heart.

Amanda: 20:11 I liked him a lot as a love interest, like I don't really have any like big things to say about him other than just I really enjoyed him. He was very sweet and willing to change and willing to get Isabelle to change and grow and be better people to each other. It was great.

Danielle: 20:26 He was very excited to spend time with her and be in a relationship with her and share this part of their lives together. I really loved that.

Amanda: 20:37 One line that I really liked. I'm not like a physically ill person, but they had this line where they went out and had this beautiful, sweet date, staring at the Brooklyn bridge or whatever. And Sasha says something like, "Don't you look forward to when we don't have to pretend that we're interesting people anymore and can just sit at home and watch Netflix?" And I was like, yes, that is the dream. \*laughter\*

Danielle: 21:01 So Isa it has several friends, several great friends. And one terrible friend in this group of healthy, she calls them healthy, friends. They're these girls at her school and like Amanda said in the synopsis, oftentimes they forget completely that she's sick because she doesn't try to explain her pain to them because she doesn't want to be an imposition. Or because she's learned over time that they won't listen. I really love when she ditches Ashley, her super toxic friend. Like, you don't need toxic friends. You don't need them.

Amanda: 21:41 I liked that too.

Danielle: 21:42 Yeah. I wanted to share that because I know I said the joking thing about her mom being the most dramatic thing in this book, but I think that her friendships were a point of real drama that a lot of people can relate to. It was really obvious that her healthy friends did not appreciate her or make enough effort to understand what she was going through.

Amanda: 22:06 It felt very similar to the friendship end in *The Hate You Give* when it was just, she's been saying lousy things for a long time and then you just reached a tipping point. Then you're done. And I think it's good for kids to see you can be done when people just say terrible things to you all the time and then give bad, not-apologies.

Danielle: 22:24 Right. Precisely that.

Danielle: 22:26 And similar to *The Hate You Give*, Ashley really acted like she was doing Isa favor by being friends with her. You don't need that.

Amanda: 22:35 You do not.

Amanda: 22:37 In case you can't tell, we liked this a lot.

Danielle: 22:41 A Latte.

Amanda: 22:42 A Latte. Yeah. Strong recommend it should be in your classroom library. It's such a good book. Please read it. Give it to people. It is a perfect, snuggled up by the fireplace, near the winter with the snow coming down, and your hot cocoa and your Sick Kids in Love. That is the day.

Danielle: 23:00 Very squishy book.

Amanda: 23:01 Very squishy.

Amanda: 23:02 That's our show for today, friends. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter at @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you. Don't forget to support this show by visiting our Patreon, leaving us a review or telling your bookish friend about our work. Happy reading!