
Title: All That It Ever Meant

Author: Blessing Musariri

LIKES

- Tender moments – laughed and cried at this book
- Setting – learning about Zimbabwe
- A puzzle right up until near the end when the pieces fell into place
- The structure and the surprise
- Well-written – unobtrusive imagery
- Characterisation – not a huge amount of action and yet we get to know them well
- The examination of storytelling itself – different perspectives, how memories change. Playfulness and humour. What you hide about yourself when you tell a story.
- Mix of humour and sadness – from the ‘micorphone’ to seeing Baba’s grief on the balcony
- Range of emotions
- Saw lots of different sides to the main characters
- The parents were people, with their own story
- Love a road trip novel
- Worked well on audiobook
- Different ways of dealing with grief. Realistic impact of grief shown through the kids. Processing grief is slow.
- Some people loved Metacais – non-binary representation, the taking of Mum’s hand at the end. Narrator plays cat and mouse with her difficult feelings but Metacais called her out. Device which worked to enable her to have dialogue with someone.
- Chichi and her relationship with her father – would have liked even more of that
- The speech at the funeral – so moving
- Portrayal of fatherhood. The challenge of managing his own grief and suddenly becoming a single dad. He’s a well-rounded character
- Portrayal of Zimbabwe and it’s culture – nuanced and complex
- The unreliable narrator – always adds layers.
- Development of the themes – belonging, identity, dual culture, adaptability (seeing the people in Zimbabwe and how they manage the heat)

DISLIKES

- Frustrated with the narrator – often wanted to see things she didn't show
- Would have liked to have known what happened when they got home
- Slow pace, esp in the first half – might be particularly hard for younger readers. But then the reveal was too sudden.
- Not sure who it is aimed at – who to give it to?
- Too many things which didn't go anywhere. Almost there, but not quite.
- Would have liked more teen angst!
- A protagonist who can't make use of what she's learned, because she's dead.
- Confusing on the way through – only makes sense at the end.
- Main character – a bit too insightful for her age?
- Metacis slowed things down – would probably not get rid of them but not sure how much this character helped the story.

PUZZLES

- Lots of puzzles along the way – very late to realising Caroline wasn't a separate person
- Metacais – e.g. the changing wardrobe of clothes etc. Felt we were missing something. Shona cultural references?
- What's the significance of the coin at the end – currency from Mozambique, called metacais?
- A teacher question – how did they get out of school for such an extended trip??

PATTERNS (Within this book and links to other books and real-life experiences)**Within the novel**

- The different settings and what they reveal about Zimbabwe – the backpackers, the tourist hotel, the rural village
- Contrasts between Britain and Zimbabwe, including the weather.
- The weather – bleakness of Britain versus light and brightness Zimbabwe. Juxtaposition in actual weather but also pathetic fallacy – the light and warmth when the oppression of guilt is further away
- Meticais – the link with the coins in the accident. The last thing Mati remembers seeing
- Some subtle clues throughout but very easily missed
- Foreshadowing of Mama's death although subtle – you don't die by accident unless it's your time
- Juxtaposition of humour and grief
- The pipe – is it a significant symbol or cultural presence?

Real life links

- The Gladdest Thing – uplifting poems shared with a boy who was grieving a parent's death
- Names – having an English name and a Shona name
- Death – the substantial (or not) nature of death. Powerful – links to the idea of spirituality / grief
- 1st and 2nd generation immigrant experiences

Links to other books / film

- A Monster Calls – boy coming to terms with the death of his mother
- The Railway Children – siblings coping with the mysterious disappearance of their father
- Atonement – twist at the very end
- Joy Luck Club – getting to know her mother's culture
- The Roles We Play – dual identities, culture clashes
- Things Fall Apart - colonialism
- Grief is the Thing with Feathers, by Max Porter
- Bone Talk – supernatural element, exploring the kind of person you want to be
- The Girl and the Goddess – Nikita Gill – illustrated poems, healing from trauma, colonialism
- The 6th Sense – clues that we missed about a character being dead until we read /watch again

- Pet – supernatural element, gender/trans
- Needle
- Links to love and relationships poems at GCSE – students don't always have the ability to understand or explore a parent's feelings and books like this help to explore that theme earlier
- Spiritual guides – The Lion King, Star Wars

HOOKS

- Culture clash would appeal.
- Can think of some rebellious girls who would like Chichi
- Photocopy the first page to intrigue
- They may be familiar with protagonists who have a spiritual guide (Lion King, Star Wars)

READING ALOUD, HAVING IGNITED THEIR CURIOSITY

OUTPUTS FOLLOWING READING (ORAL AND WRITTEN)

- Use as stimulus for travel writing or descriptive writing about a landscape
- Work on structure
- Writing from different points of view – Baba, Chichi, Tana
- Exploration of the way she uses analogies and imagery to put across feels. Use to write some poetry.

RESOURCES

OTHER