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Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Caught Inside: a surfing passage
Lauren Benton Angulo
SurferSeen
978-0-615-62917-9
Five Stars (out of Five)

The Hawaiian word *pono* describes a state of harmony and balance much like that achieved by Lauren Benton Angulo in her debut novel, *Caught Inside: A Surfing Passage*. Angulo's multifaceted coming-of-age story balances the energetic action of the Kauai surfing scene with the quiet introspection of two surfers brought together by tragedy.

Riding the waves one minute and knocked from his surfboard the next, fifteen-year-old competitive surfer Kaimana (Kai) Keller doesn't know how he ended up in a hospital bed, or why he can't respond to the voices that fill his room. Chief among those voices is that of Kai's reluctant rescuer, Kekoa Jones. Feeling strangely compelled to visit a boy he doesn't really know, the older surfer begins talking at Kai's bedside. As Kekoa tells surfing tales rich with metaphorical life lessons, the comatose Kai begins to listen. *Caught Inside* is a story of transformation for man and boy, as each rides the ebb and flow of hope and hopelessness to a more complete understanding of the world and his place in it.

Kai and Kekoa take turns telling their stories, which are set in differint fonts. Kekoa muses aloud about his stalled career, lost dreams, and, most vividly, the sublime moments he has experienced communing with the sea. Kai fades in and out, reliving his own memories of escaping family fights by taking refuge in the safety of his surfing sanctuary. Distinctive at first, the two voices come to mirror each other, aptly illustrating the communion of minds.

Angulo herself is a Kauai surfer, as are her husband, son, and even her dog. Her intimate knowledge of the surfing world shows in her expert use of surf lingo, from "grom" to "kook." Kai and Kekoa both live, breathe, and eat surfing, so the jargon feels natural; Angulo includes a glossary for the unitiated.

The surfers' stories are highly detailed, covering everything from wave height to proper foot placement. The technical descriptions could become tedious for the reader who doesn't

share Angulo's passion for surfing, but they are balanced by the author's passion for the awe-inspiring natural world of Kauai's coast. Readers will get to know both the peaceful landscape of the beautiful Hanalei Valley and the wild, unpredictable force of the waves.

The characters in *Caught Inside* share little actual conversation. Instead, their philosophical musings spill onto the page. Angulo breaks up these ponderings with forays into the outside world, where Kekoa applies some of the lessons he has been learning. Short chapters help to maintain a brisk pace, as does the unresolved tension of Kai's fate.

Throughout the intertwined tales, Angulo maintains her sense of pono. Her take on the world is never one-dimensional; she invites readers of all ages to consider the many manifestations of life.

Sheila M. Trask