

Metamorphosis: Junior Year

Betsy Franco

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When Betsy Franco's young Ovid reflects Seems like we're all just groping our way through a labyrinth fighting our personal minotaurs morphing into who we really are like it or not he seems to be channeling his namesake sharing the same knowledge that the famous Roman poet did. Like Ovid famous for his epic poem *Metamorphoses* Franco's Ovid delivers a message of the transformative powers of experience and love.

Our narrator a budding artist and poet begins to write as a desperate attempt to retrieve my sanity from the trash he says. When his beloved but drug-addicted sister runs away for good Ovid is left to manage the pain of her loss as well as the overwhelming attempts of his parents to make his life their own version of perfect. It is only through his artwork and writing that he finds any sense of release from the pain that sometimes cripples him. Through a series of journal entries poems and ink drawings Ovid shares glimpses into the reality—and mythology—of himself and his classmates teens who are as Ovid notes so unpredictable so scary so layered that they cannot be understood at a cursory glance. As the book progresses Ovid's classmates' stories as well as his own development both as an artist and as a human being show how experiences can literally transform our identity for better or worse.

Ovid's use of language and the interactions between characters give a strong sense of authenticity something that Betsy Franco has obviously taken pains to create. As the editor of three different anthologies of poems written for and by teenagers including one entirely devoted to love poems (*Falling Hard: Love Poems by Teenagers* also published by Candlewick) Franco has insight into the ways teens interact and communicate. Ovid's poetry clearly has the voice of an empathetic adolescent struggling with identity a reflection of Franco's understanding of and ability to create normal adolescent emotions. In her acknowledgements Franco thanks the many high school students who gave valuable feedback and advice and their contributions to the book are clearly seen in the vivid if brief depictions of the characters as well as the vernacular.

Another layer of authenticity is added by the illustrations. Tom Franco the author's son has been an artist since he was a teenager and the ink-on-paper illustrations originate from Tom's high school drawings.

This attention to evoking an authentic world make this book ideal for the fourteen-to-eighteen-year-old set. Ideally this book could be paired with the original *Metamorphoses* offering not just an introduction to classic myths but also a way for teens to relate to mythology and apply some of its major themes to modern life. The clear parallels as well as the modern twists and interpretations of classic myths offer a wealth of opportunities for educators.

The brevity of the book is at times frustrating especially because Franco creates such compelling characters that readers want to know more about them. Ovid's own development at times seems a bit rushed. The stories he relays each stand by themselves and are unified in their theme in a way that resembles the original work. The book is highly accessible and the message of transformation is empowering for young adults.

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