

Never Say a Mean Word Again: A Tale from Medieval Spain

Jacqueline Jules

Durga Yael Bernhard, Illustrator

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Appealing acrylic illustrations, a wonderful story, and an important message make this book enjoyable for children and adults.

A story of bullying, acceptance, and friendship, *Never Say a Mean Word Again: A Tale from Medieval Spain*, by Jacqueline Jules, is loosely inspired by a legend about a Jewish poet who was the vizier and military commander to the Muslim caliph (or king). It is a delightful account of turning meanness and rudeness into kindness and friendship.

Samuel has a difficult time making friends, being the son of the wise, important, and feared grand vizier. After literally running into Hamza, and then causing lamb sauce to spill onto his clothes at a banquet, Hamza is rude and angry toward Samuel. Samuel apologizes, but Hamza won't hear it. Hearing how rude Hamza was to his son, the vizier tells Samuel to never allow Hamza to speak meanly to him again. Samuel tries to think of ways to implement this, but after he dismisses some ideas, he goes to Hamza's home with a lemon, thinking that the sourness would make him unable to speak. Instead of Hamza sucking on the lemon, the boys play catch with it. Samuel returns to Hamza's home the next day, and the next, with different ideas of forcing Hamza to be nice, but instead the boys become friends.

Jules has crafted a folk tale that is sure to please. She writes in a gracious and enjoyable way, with simplicity and humor, as evidenced in one of Samuel's dismissed ideas: "Maybe he could train a monkey to sit on Hamza's shoulders. The monkey could clamp Hamza's lips shut. Training a monkey would take time. And where would he get a monkey?" This wonderful story is basic enough for young children to follow, and entertaining for adults.

Durga Yael Bernhard has constructed appealing acrylic illustrations, with Moorish-influenced designs. Her muted color choices and smooth designs complement the text wonderfully, calmly propelling the story forward.

The cover is designed with the title in the center, two boys (Samuel and Hamza) on either side of the title, all in the middle of an illustrated design. The back cover gives a short synopsis of the book inside of the similar design on the front, giving the book a cohesive feeling. The internal layout is pleasant and easy to follow, with a striking font that is easy to read, and perfectly accompanied by the illustrations. The book ends with an author's note about the origins of the story, and information about the time and place of the historical events.

A moral tale of friendship, *Never Say a Mean Word Again: A Tale from Medieval Spain*, has an admirable story guided by marvelous illustrations that will inspire children and adults.

BETH VANHOUTEN (April 15, 2014)

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