

Pam and Jodi's Journey: Book 9

N. K. Beckley

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Pam and Jodi's Journey is compelling as it portrays students raising consciousness and standing up for their rights.

N.K. Beckley's middle grade novel *Pam and Jodi's Journey* is upbeat and informative. It focuses on a deaf student and her interpreter in a new school where they face obstacles and meet allies.

Pam has 80% hearing loss and communicates using American Sign Language; her interpreter, Jodi, makes it possible for her to learn in standard classrooms and to socialize with non-deaf children. But at their new school no one knows ASL, and Pam cannot make friends as quickly as she'd like. She and Jodi work with a teacher to start an ASL club, facing prejudice and ignorance along the way. At the same time, Pam learns the history of ASL and the deaf community in the United States to complete a school project.

The book is an excellent option for elementary age readers, written in an easy-to-read, always clear style. Chapters are portioned well, with each progressing just enough, functioning as a complete scene, and offering a satisfying transition to the next chapter. Some of the most valuable sections include Pam's research into the history of ASL; the historical figures she discusses are inspiring.

The book's themes—celebrating difference and communication—are strong throughout. Conflicts arise: one with Mr. Gilbert, the school's club coordinator, and one related to Pam trying to write a school paper. The conflict with Mr. Gilbert generates frustration and propels the story, though Pam's writing troubles are more one-note, taking place mostly in Pam's mind and with low stakes.

There are a lot of interactions between Pam, Jodi, and the teachers, some of which are repetitive. Conversations occur without many emotional stakes, such as discussions of homework assignments. The best conversations tend to involve Mr. Gilbert: his anti-ASL-club attitude brings substantive conflict.

Pam exemplifies a can-do attitude, and Jodi is always there to help. They are likable if not complex. Secondary characters, including the nuns who teach at Pam's school, help to push Pam to try things that are outside of her comfort zone, like writing for the school newspaper, making the story richer and more varied.

Barry, a school classmate, Mr. Gilbert's son, and friend of Pam's, has a grandmother who already knows ASL, which allows for more valuable context about ASL to be discussed in a natural way. The conclusion wraps up all loose ends; it is satisfying but not surprising.

Pam and Jodi's Journey portrays students raising consciousness and standing up for their rights in a proverbial way for a middle grade audience.

LAURA LEAVITT (April 2, 2019)

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