

THE BOOK AND BEYOND

An educator's guide for exploring children's and YA literature

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Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa
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Title: Tama Sāmoa

Author(s): Dahlia & Mani Malaeulu

Illustrator(s):

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

The book

Physical object

- This edition is slightly smaller than a standard A5 paperback novel, with vanilla/cream paper.
- 75pp of narrative/fictional element plus glossary, divided by a section of discussion questions, followed by Tama Sāmoa project real-life stories.

Design & cover

- The cover illustration extends around to the back cover.
- Features a grown Sāmoan male holding the hand of a younger boy — both are wearing 'ie lavalava. The image of p'ea and 'ie lavalava at short length indicates the tatau to be freshly completed or displaying cultural marks in a traditional celebration.
- The use of colour in the body, clothes and shading is the dominant feature contrasting with a white background.
- Interesting image placement — half of man shows Sāmoan cultural tatau design, the arm on back cover has a koru pattern indicating Aotearoa NZ.

Illustration

- No illustrations other than cover art by Alex Mate Tuaoi — NZ-born Sāmoan (Wainuiomata).
- Lambros To'omaga identified as cover model — cousin of Dahlia and Mani Malaeulu.

Characters

- 4 senior high school friends/uso (brothers). Each boy has a chapter from his point of view. Voices and energy bounce off the pages, making them relatable.
- Sione — captain of 1st XV, oldest child, plays rugby to a high level (rep teams). Starting to feel the pressure of having to keep doing well in rugby, get into Uni etc for other people (Dad, Mum, whole 'āiga).
- Lima — struggles with school, uses jokes to diffuse or distract, has weekend job in produce department at local supermarket.
- Tavita — very quiet, lives with Mum, little brother and sister, Dad left the family (is with a Pālagi woman), close to his nana, aware of family struggles, tries to help out but feels a lot of pressure, feels alone despite being surrounded by friends/family.
- Filipino — lives with his aunty, family back in Savaii, changed his name in intermediate to Philip, exploring his cultural identity.
- Mika — grounds the other characters, is a sounding board and support for them, keeps them connected to each other and their culture.

Plot

- Driven by the boys navigating the world and their reactions to challenges in school, with family and life.
- Each of the characters addresses Uso in letter form as part of a school letter-writing project. It is raw and direct.
- Each chapter encompasses the boys' pressures, struggles and growth.

Setting

- We are taken through the experiences of the boys whilst at school, (in class, lunchtime, within the guidance office) but also homes, parties, rugby and extra activities.
- It is not a specific time and place, but is urban, present-day Aotearoa New Zealand.

Theme & message

- Respect, love and loyalty in 'aiga life, and familial expectations.
- Friendship and brotherhood.
- Grief, vulnerability and the impact of loss of young/teen life.
- Identity, belonging and acceptance.
- Coming of age — the challenges of being Tama Sāmoa.

Language

- The language/tone of the boys' letters is realistic and relatable — conversational and open | talanoa.
- Written in English, interspersed with Sāmoan words and phrases.
- Sāmoan proverbs bookend the narrative and emphasise the themes.

Mood & feeling

- There is a feeling of mystery in who the boys are writing/expressing themselves to and why.
- Strong feeling of guilt and confusion — trying to make sense of things, broken up with comedic timing and upbeat feelings — because of the personalities and experiences of the boys.

Genre & format

- This is a Pasifika fictional novel with a non-fiction section including study questions and real-life stories.
- It is a YA, coming-of-age novel.
- The glossary is a great access point for non-Samoan speakers.

The inquiry

Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

- How do the different members of our family play a role in shaping our values, beliefs and actions?
- When we can be dominated with ideas of what we 'should' be, how do you find and keep to an identity that remains true and authentic for yourself?
- How do people change through their relationships with others?
- What does it mean to belong and can we authentically belong to more than one group?