

## ***Cemetery Boys* Transcript**

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Annika: I'm Annika, she/her, although, all pronouns work for me.

KJ: I'm KJ you can call me whatever.

Danielle: I'm Danielle, and I go by she/her and they/them. And for this podcast, we're reading *Cemetery Boys* by Aiden Thomas.

KJ: Yadriel has summoned a ghost, and now he can't get rid of him. When his traditional Latinx has problems accepting his true gender, Yadriel becomes determined to prove himself a real *brujo*. With his cousin and best friend Maritza, he performs a ritual himself, and then sets out to find the ghost of his murdered cousin and set it free. However, the ghost he summons is actually Julian Diaz, the school's resident bad boy, and Julian is not about to go quietly into death. He's determined to find out what happened and tie off some loose ends before he leaves. Left with no choice, Yadriel agrees to help Julian so they can both get what they want. But the longer Yadriel spends with Julian, the less he wants to let him leave. Aiden Thomas is a queer, trans, Latinx author, and this is their first novel.

A: Oh, my goodness, I loved it so, so deeply.

KJ: I think often times, in queer Young Adult books, the queer protagonist is either embraced by their family, or shunned almost entirely. But what I found interesting with this novel was that it ventured into the vast area between where it feels like the people around Yadriel-- it felt they were embracing him but also pushing him back.

D: Mhmm. Grandmother using his deadname.

KJ: Yeah! I'm very glad we don't know his deadname. Because it's irrelevant. The present is all that matters.

A: Absolutely. I enjoyed the fact that not only does the author not share Yadriel's deadname, but also does not share Flacca's, even though one of the people says it.

D: Mhmm.

A: Or he—Yadriel knew her before-- and he says, "But not by that name," and I just found that was very empowering, really, for, um, both characters that they are who they are now, they are not who the other people see them as.

D: Yes. I definitely enjoyed not learning his dead name. It shows more of a respect for a character even though, it is just a character, in a sense it is a person at the same time.

A: Absolutely.

KJ: Right. From what I got from when his grandmother called him that-- at times I feel like older people use the excuse that "I'm from a different generation." I think that excuse is BS because, just be respectful, and calling someone by their deadname is so disrespectful.

D: Yeah.

A: And the misgendering as well.

KJ: Right.

A: Like, that same scene the grandmother says, "But you'll always be my little girl."

KJ: Ugh, cringe.

A: I know.

D: That was terrible.

A: You can tell she means well, but she is just not quite there.

KJ: Right right right right right.

D: And I think that's what I enjoyed about his book. The fact that it seems like his family is trying to do better.

A: Mhmm.

D: But, they're not all the way there yet.

A: Yes. Yeah. It-- it feels more real. I mean, it's not that families that accept differences immediately are not real, and it's not like families that don't accept people are not real, but it just feels so much more real to have the array of people who accept/don't accept and are working on it.

D: Mhmm.

KJ: Mhmm.

A: I tend to not go for books with the romantic bent, but I don't know anybody could read this book and not fall in love with Julian. I mean, really. (Laughs)

A: He's adorable, and I love him. And every single one of the characters feels so real.

D: Mhmm

A: And, Yadriel's relationships with both his friends and his family and Julian's relationships with his friends and family. Ugh, they're lovely. Also, I want to adopt all of Julian's friends. They will all be my children now.

A & D: (Laughs)

D: I loved how heartfelt it was in terms of friends and family, while still maintaining that spooky aspect of a YA mystical novel. It was great.

A: Yes.

KJ: There was a quote that Julian said I wrote down somewhere...

A: I bet it's the same one I did. Is it "Queer folks are like wolves, we travel in packs"?

KJ: No--

D: I loved that one

KJ: --but, I did like that one.

A: Okay (laughs)

D: I also loved how Julian accepted Yadriel from the start.

KJ: Right

D: And I remembered that one scene where he asked him, like, you know, "Are you afraid of being who you are, or is it your family?" And we saw Yadriel have that conflict on how to properly come out and how he actually feels about the whole situation.

KJ: Oh, okay, here we go, when Yadriel is saying he's the first trans *brujo*, and Julian says something like, "Uh, you're not. There are early ones, you just never learned their stories."

D: Yes

KJ: That's like a hard truth right there.

D: Mhmm.

A: Yeah.

KJ: It's a powerful reminder what stories get told, what stories are deemed worth preserving.

A: Yeah, and that's true. Going on the what stories get told aspect: part of the reason I love this so much is, growing up as a gender-fluid person, I never would have had this kind of story when I was a kid. I'm a bit older than both of you, I am almost 40, and when I was a teen, like Yadriel and Julian, there really was no queer stories out there for anyone, let alone a positive queer story, or a trans story. So, just the fact that this story is being told is so fabulous, and not only is the story being told, but the reader for the audiobook is also trans, and the person who did the cover art is non-binary, and I just, I'm just so overwhelmed by how awesome that is. (laughs)

D: It's great.

KJ: I didn't know the person who did the cover art was non-binary.

A: Yeah! I just found that out, like, a couple minutes ago when I was doing a little bit extra research, and I'm like, "That is fabulous!" They say in the publishing industry, "Own Voices" and this is about as "Own Voices" as you can get, really.

D: Mhmm

A: That was a little off-topic, sorry.

KJ: No, no, that was..

A: (laughs)

D: Yeah, the cover art is great. I love it.

A: Yeah, the interview that I had read sad that Aiden had come across the artist because they did Voltron fanart, and I'm like "Yes! Let's just put all sorts of awesome things together!"

A & D: (Laughs)

A: I love, um, Julian's various truth-bombs, that he just, like, drops randomly throughout the books. Like the quote I said earlier about wolves traveling in packs and things like that. I also have written down during the scene where he and Yadriel are talking about gender and sexuality and he-- it's not an exact quote—but, what I wrote down is "Other's people's impressions cannot change who you are." I really loved that, because you will always come across somebody who tells you that you aren't who you are, but—

KJ: Mhmm!

A: It doesn't matter, because they can't change that.

KJ: Right, right.

D: I loved how blunt Julian was,

A: Yes.

D: It added more to his character.

A: Yeah.

D: And I also related to it because I'm like, "Oh! Finally a character that's as blunt as I am." (laughs)

A: I loved his like, Yadriel's having this moment of "Should I do this should I not do this?" And Julian's off and he's doing it already.

KJ: Yeah.

D: Yes.

A: "Just do it!" (laughs)

KJ: I felt that Julian he was so vibrant he had bubbly energy, and when he crossed out the deadname from the yearbook...

D: Oh, yes, that too.

A: Yesssssss!

KJ: And replacing it with his true name.

A: Right.

KJ: Oh my god, boyfriend material!

A: Exactly. (laughs)

D: I also loved how he had all these odds stacked against him with his parents and his brother, and the gangs and everything, but he was still this bubbly, happy person on his own schedule basically, and I just loved that part.

A: Yeah.

KJ: Right.

A: He just breaks stereotypes left and right. It's like everyone at school thinks he's this tough brooding bad boy, and here's this kid who really liked to have fun and breaks the stereotype by being gay as well.

D: Speaking of him being gay, when we first found out, was that a surprise to anybody?

KJ: No.

D: Yeah, same here.

A: I mean, to be a romance, he kinda had to?

A & D: (laughs)

A: You know?

D: Yeah.

(laughs)

KJ: I saw it coming, I just--

A: I just like how he just dropped it there like, "Yeah! I'm gay!"

D: "You didn't know?"

A: "So?" (laughs)

D: What about the other characters that weren't well talked about in the book, such as his dad? His uncle?

A: Oh, my goodness I felt so bad for his dad. Here's his dad, like, trying his hardest, and his nephew just like disappears out of the face of the earth and his wife has just died recently and all he wants to do is get the *ofrenda* ready and see his wife again, and figure out what's going on, and his son is just like dippin' out constantly on him (laughs) without any explanation. The poor guy's gotta, like, have so much new grey hair from just these couple of days. I just felt so bad for him. I felt like it was really well set up that we learn the story about the past that they didn't want to repeat, I felt like both those things really set up the big reveal in the end very well.

D: I also liked the part where most of the people being killed are younger Latinx kids, and they said it throughout the book how they didn't want to call the police because they wouldn't do anything about Julian being missing, and that also added another factor of realism to the book as well, because that, frankly, still happens today.

A: Absolutely, yeah. I learned a lot about what it is like to live as a Latinx person in the Los Angeles area. I read this, and I feel like I learned a lot more about a culture I didn't really know about.

KJ: So, I had a thought. When I went into reading this book, I kinda figured I knew what it would be about, but, I mean, obviously I went in pretty much blind. I knew it was a queer YA. I was surprised because the spirit-seeing was something totally normal throughout the story, as in like *brujx*, that part through me completely off guard. It took a chapter or two to the *brujx*, Day of the Dead and how the *brujas* could heal with, what was it, chicken blood?

D: Yeah.

A: Or animal blood. I think pigs blood worked, too.

KJ: I, like, fell head over heels with that fantastic blend, of, you know, the Hispanic culture in this modern day setting. I think Aiden Thomas did a really good job with interlacing facts about Día de los Muertos into the story without any hint of “info dumping.” Such as, like, I loved the story as Lady Death and Balam that was told by Lita while preparing the cala...

A: *Calaveras*?

KJ: Yes! Thank you!

A: You're welcome

A & D: (laughs)

D: I loved how this story talked more about *brujas*. I love learning about stuff like that from different cultures.

KJ: Right.

D: And seeing it in an actual fiction book instead of non-fiction or watching a video about it online.

KJ: Yeah.

D: It taught me more about it that way.

A: I also thought it was funny that when they go to the party store, they go down the aisle and there's all the sugar skull stuff. And he starts going, “I'm not going to give into this cultural appropriation stuff!” and Julian is just like, “Shh!” (Laughs) I just thought that was kinda funny. But yet again, everything that Julian does is perfect and the best, so...

A & D: (laughs)



So, this concludes the discussion about *Cemetery Boys* by Aiden Thomas. Join us next episode as we cover *The Low, Low Woods* by Carmen Maria Machado, illustrated by DaNi.



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