

Aristotle and Dante Dive Into the Waters of the World

Essay By Ellie May

Aristotle was a young boy in the midst of the AIDS pandemic, who only recently found himself liking the same gender. While trying to live his perfect life with his boyfriend, Dante, he faced countless acts of hate towards not only LGBTQ+, but also other people who were different in any way. Because of this, Ari has to learn how to get through his life freely, but having to tip-toe around the unnecessary hate from his peers. *Aristotle and Dante Dive Into the Waters of The World*, is a book written by Benjamin Alire Sáenz that demonstrates the theme, belonging for anyone can be found if one searches.

Aristotle, a young boy who struggles with accepting himself, found belonging with his friends who support him. Ari was seen being invited to eat with one of his friends, despite her knowing he was queer. "Susie shook her head. 'You have to eat with us. We want you to.'" (202 Alaire Sáenz). Susie is reassuring Ari that she wants him there because she enjoys his company, but she phrases it in a more aggressive tone since that is just how she shows her affection. This is extremely impactful given in this period of time, people were often rejected or pitied for being queer, and this is not what Susie shows in her words or actions. Friendship is being able to look past certain things, and this is exactly as Ari's friends do, showing complete support for his differences and making him feel belonging.

Ari was able to come out to his parent's, whom he wasn't sure would accept him, but he found belonging in his family. Ari's mother is extremely supportive of his and Dante's relationship, and it is shown during multiple circumstances. "I fell asleep reading a book. Legs was lying next to me when my mother woke me. 'Dante's on the phone.'" (18 Alaire Sáenz) Ari's mother was alerting Ari that Dante, his boyfriend, was calling and encouraged him to pick the phone up joyfully. Ari's mother is very clearly demonstrating her understanding for his personality, which wasn't very common amongst parents due to the AIDS outbreak. Such a small act from Ari's mother was not overlooked, because it illustrated her affection to her son. Many in this time period in this situation might dehumanize or possibly disown their child if they saw the love between Ari and Dante.

Finally, Ari was able to find belonging with his lover, Dante. Dante started off as a friend Ari made at the pool, and it slowly progressed into a relationship. Dante isn't too shy when it comes to showing his affection for Ari, making it obvious that he does have very positive feelings towards him. "I think Dante wanted to know everything about me." (132 Alaire Sáenz) Dante was able to show he compassion, and Ari received it willingly as the two shared feelings for one another. Ari was endeared knowing he is loved, and he was able to find belonging with someone he loved very much as well, even if the circumstances he was stuck in made most people hate him for their affection. Dante's active display of love was seen by Ari, showing him that he belongs with him despite being in a terrible situation.

In conclusion, belonging is found in Aristotle and Dante with his family, friends, and his lover. Belonging in this book is extremely important since it gives so many examples of hatred and homophobia throughout the story, leaving Ari feeling distant and alone. Its theme is relatable for numerous people in situations where they feel alienated for being themselves, and how just a small group of people who are free of judgment can lead to all the difference in somebody's life. I would rate this book a 4/10 because it was well written, but the story felt incomplete. I wouldn't recommend this book because even though the beginning of the series was beautifully written with lots of emotion, the author threw that all away by trying to rush

unnecessary romance into the very end. I think the concept was smart, but the execution of it felt poorly done.

Work Cited

Sáenz, Benjamin Alire. *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2012.