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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

From Scratch by Tembi Locke

Summary

It was love at first sight when actress Tembi met professional chef, Saro, on a street in Florence. There was just one problem: Saro's traditional Sicilian family did not approve of his marrying a black American woman. However, the couple, heartbroken but undeterred, forged on. They built a happy life in Los Angeles, with fulfilling careers, deep friendships, and the love of their lives: a baby girl they adopted at birth. Eventually, they reconciled with Saro's family just as he faced a formidable cancer that would consume all their dreams.

From Scratch chronicles three summers Tembi spends in Sicily with her daughter, Zoela, as she begins to piece together a life without her husband in his tiny hometown hamlet of farmers. Where once Tembi was estranged from Saro's family, now she finds solace and nourishment -- literally and spiritually -- at her mother-in-law's table. In the Sicilian countryside, she discovers the healing gifts of simple fresh food, the embrace of a close knit community, and timeless traditions and wisdom that light a path forward. All along the way she reflects on her and Saro's romance -- an incredible love story that leaps off the pages.

In Sicily, it is said that every story begins with a marriage or a death -- in Tembi Locke's case, it is both. "Locke's raw and heartfelt memoir will uplift readers suffering from the loss of their own loved ones" (*Publishers Weekly*), but her story is also about love, finding a home, and chasing flavor as an act of remembrance. *From Scratch* is for anyone who has dared to reach for big love, fought for what mattered most, and those who needed a powerful reminder that life is delicious.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how the book's structure shapes your understanding of Tembi's story. How do the flashbacks inform her emotional journey as a widow? Why do you think she chose to write her memoir in this way?
2. Tembi acknowledges that her decision to travel to Sicily so soon after Saro's death goes against conventional wisdom. Why do you think she decides to go? If you were in her shoes, would you have done the same?
3. How does Nonna and Tembi's relationship evolve over the three summers depicted in the book? What are the major turning points that bring them closer?

4. Did your impression of Nonna change while you were reading? Why or why not?
5. Does *From Scratch* reinforce or challenge any preconceptions you may have had about rural Sicilian life?
6. Tembi uses food and cooking throughout the book as symbolism for grief, healing, and resilience, from “cooking is about surrender,” (p. 69) to “life was separating my curd from my whey,” (p. 222). What was your favorite passage using this motif?
7. The facilitator at the adoption agency tells Locke that “at the heart of adoption is this love and this loss, all at once. Your daughter will know this feeling one day. It is the realization that she had to say good-bye in order to say hello. That that is how your love as a family came to be,” (p. 130). How do these words garner new meaning for Tembi and Zoela after Saro’s death?
8. How does Zoela both comfort and challenge Tembi after Saro’s death? Did Tembi’s description of parenting through grief surprise you in any way?
9. The Sicilian landscape -- Tembi’s “stone inheritance” -- is a character in its own right in this memoir. Discuss how the natural surroundings both reflect and contradict her emotions at various points in her story.
10. In her quest to find belonging within Saro’s family and in Aliminusa, Tembi must navigate barriers of language, race, and class. Discuss the moments where she feels most like an outsider, and the ways in which she is able to find mutual understanding and respect despite seemingly insurmountable differences.
11. Reread the passage that begins with Locke’s realization on page 239: “I had had three marriages to Saro: the one we had experienced as newly-in-love married people; the one we had spent in the trenches of surviving cancer; and the one I had with him now, as his widow.” What do you make of this statement and her reflections on the passage of time that follow?
12. How does Tembi’s definition of “home” evolve throughout the course of the memoir?
13. Discuss the significance of the book’s title. In what ways does Tembi start her life “from scratch,” and in what ways is she building off a preexisting foundation?

Summary and Discussion Questions from the publisher.