

Shark Teeth

Sherri Winston

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In Sherri Winston's novel *Shark Teeth*, an adolescent girl faces challenges when she and her younger siblings reunite after being in foster care.

Twelve-year-old Kita kept her family together for years while her mother was drinking or gone. She fed and bathed her sister, Lilli, and brother, Lamar. She paid the bills, cleaned the house, and did laundry. Still, after an accident at home, the siblings went into foster care; their mother went to a treatment facility.

When Kita's mother returns home, sober and employed, Kita wants to believe that she is for real. But five-year-old Lilli is skeptical, even though their mother is acting like the adult again. When Kita's best friend, Niecy, brings up the twirl team, Kita decides to try out.

Miss Kadejah, the twirl team coach and assistant principal, becomes a different kind of adult in Kita's life, attentive and responsible. Her encouragement, Niecy's friendship, and finding joy in twirling help Kita to build self-esteem, a circle of friends, and strategies to deal with her anxiety. Though her family situation is still tense, over time, Kita develops a support system that she can count on.

Sharks feature into the story in various ways. Kita's mother told her classmates "my baby got teeth stacked up like a shark!", resulting in children bullying her. Kita fears sharks; Lamar loves them. Kita sometimes wakes at night unable to move—it feels like a shark swallowing her whole. Here and elsewhere, her voice is well individualized. And as Kita learns to value her own voice and dreams, the book works toward a satisfying ending.

Shark Teeth is an inspiring novel in which a girl and her siblings survive a difficult home situation, rediscovering their dreams and self-worth.

LYNNE JENSEN LAMPE (January / February 2024)

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