

**Reviewer username:** Anonymous

**School:** Valencia High

**Grade:** Freshman

**Book title:** Sweet Bean Paste

**Book author:** Durian Sukegawa

**Rate 1-5 (1-Lowest to 5-Highest):** 4.3

*Sweet Bean Paste* is a heartwarming novel that tells the story of Sentaro, the owner of a shop that sells a traditional Japanese confection called dorayaki. Initially, when Sentaro hires Tokue, an elderly lady with disfigured hands to make sweet bean paste, he is suspicious of her expertise and intentions due to her age and hands. However, he eventually is proven wrong and learns that she has more than 50 years of experience, and makes excellent sweet paste, one that he has never tasted before. As they work together, they eventually develop a special deep bond between themselves, learning more about each other's past. Additionally, their motives to work for the shop are quite different. Sentaro has a troubling past, serving jail time and paying back his debts to the previous shop owner. On the other hand, Tokue is fulfilling a life-long dream of hers as she had been ostracized from a young age due to being diagnosed with Hansen's disease which caused her to have disfigured hands.

I truly indulged in this novel, the relationship and development between Tokue and Sentaro was touching and I loved how Sentaro eventually learns to be accepting and open-minded towards others. Additionally, I enjoyed how the author incorporated the delicate process of doriyaki and sweet bean paste, as it was interesting to learn more about traditional Japanese confection and the amount of care that takes when it comes to making it. The novel also highlights important themes such as the importance of life and acceptance of others. Although I wish that the novel was a bit longer, I still found the pace to be enjoyable and it was irresistibly hard to put down and finished reading it in a span of a few hours all in one sitting.

Overall, I highly recommend this novel to teenage readers like me who enjoy a short, heartwarming novel that incorporates food and Japanese culture. The novel addresses many eye-opening themes through the development of the characters, and readers can educate themselves on how to become a better person overall as well. Lastly, I am eager to read more works from Durian Sukegawa and hope that readers will enjoy his work as much as I did.