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Book Talk

*All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven

1. Author information/biography

<https://www.jenniferniven.com/>

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• *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven has won multiple literary awards including being named a Best Book of the Year by Time Magazine.

• “I write stories about ordinary people doing extraordinary things.” — JN

• Niven’s mom, Penelope Niven, was a writer, and after her unexpected death, Niven writes with her mom in mind in order to grow and heal through her works as she honors her mom and her teachings.

“You need to be willing to let yourself cry (or laugh or feel), because if you don't cry/laugh/feel while writing your story, how do you expect your reader to?” – JN

2. Niven’s book starts with Theodore Finch openly speaking about his gloomy thoughts of suicide. Finch reveals his depressive nature as he stands on the ledge of his schools bell tower six stories above the ground contemplating whether or not today is the day he will welcome his death. On the ledge he sees Violet, who is in the same boat as he is battling with whether or not her life is worth living. They both save each other that day and embark on a journey of finding themselves while finding unexpected love. Violet is able to confide in Finch and start her healing process through his support, meanwhile Finch gets lost in the reality of his hard, defeating life.

3. “I open my eyes, and the ground is still there, hard and permanent…One. Two. Three.”(3)  
 This quote is significant to the understanding of the book as it reveals the moment that both Theodore and Violet are standing on the edge ready to end their lives. Theodore reveals his willingness to support others in their times of need as he selflessly protects Violet and helps her back to safety. This scene sets the tone for the book, as we follow Theodore and Violet to figure out whether or not they are going to be able to make it past their internal battles.

“At dinner that night, the thing I fear most happens…Feels like cheating in some way.”(111)

This scene is important to the book because it reveals how Violet has to hide the truth from her family about her suicide “attempt”. Violet is uncomfortable as her parents think she is a hero, yet the real hero is Theodore, who is overlooked by everyone in the book except for Violet. Violet has to carry the weight of her truth that she must hide in order to protect herself from the disappointment she would face from her parents if they knew she was attempting to end her life.

“In that moment, I’m thankful I’m not a parent…Actually, I know exactly how that feels.”(348)

Violet carries the weight of loving Theodore but not being able to help him through his internal battles. Violet understands the pain her parents would face if they thought they could not help her, as she knows the pain she feels after dealing with the death of her loved ones. Violet feels grief and goes through many emotions in dealing with death, and she empathizes for those who too go through suffering after loss.

4. Chapters 5, Books About Facing Death and Loss, in Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story fits this book as the character Violet grapples with death and the grief that follows. Allowing for a high school reading audience to delve into this book creates a space where people can learn ways to help support people through their experience with grief in order to let them know they are not alone. This book should be read because it brings to the forefront the reality of what could happen when death takes over the beauty of life. Students could examine the stages of grief and see how those stages affect the character Violet.

6.

Quantitative Complexity: According to Lexile and Quantile Tools, the LEXILE RANGE of complexity is1210L - 1400L, revealing that the sentences are longer, making the score higher. *All the Bright Places* is easy to follow despite complex sentence structures and suits upper grade levels 9-12. The ATOS book level for *All the Bright Places* is 5.3, earning 14.0 AR points. The long sentence structures throughout the book serve to show the complex amount of thoughts the narrators go through even in the simplest of moments.

Qualitative Complexity: The language of the text consists of suicide, sexual refernces and curse words, which appeals to younger audiences who are free in the way they speak outside of their homes and school (for the most part). The language adds to the level of complexity as it reveals the internal dialogue and struggles the narrators face within. There are two narrators in the book, each serving a differing purpose to reveal the same message, that life is worth living despite its challenges. The book can be compared to *Everything, Everything* by Nicola Yoon as it too shares the experience of a deeply depressed character coming out of their shell to explore love. This book is different from other books in its genre as it includes suicide, which is a touchy subject that many try to avoid, even in the book itself. *All the Bright Places* allows for intellectual growth and engages with personal issues teens may face.

Considering the “reader-task” considerations, *All the Bright Places* can be relatable to students and can open the door for them to share their personal experiences. Suicide is a taboo topic that is easy to avoid due to its senitiveness, yet it is vital to expose young adults to the subject so they can see the signs in themselves and others, in hopes that they can prevent the loss of a valuable life. Even if students have not experienced death or suicide firsthand, it is important to share these books with students so they can understand what brings people to make those choices.