Meet The Author: Jennifer Niven

Niven’s picture: https://www.goodreads.com/photo/author/45592.Jennifer\_Niven?page=1&photo=570446

Novel’s picture: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18460392-all-the-bright-places

Niven writes both fiction and non-fiction books. She was born on May 14, 1968, which makes her fifty years old. Niven’s previous jobs include being an actress, assistant bookstore manager, editor etc. Niven is the Emmy Award-Winning New York Times and International bestselling author of nine books, one being *All the Bright Places*. Niven’s first young adult book, All the Bright Places, was published in 2015. Niven claim’s that her biggest fear is “to be eternally separated from loved ones after death.” Niven moved to Indiana at one point in her life and told her mom that the place is ugly and her mother’s reply was, “Just remember that what’s ugly to you is beautiful to someone else,” and this idea of finding beauty in things that you see as ugly is shown throughout Niven’s novel, *All the Bright Places.* Years ago, the author knew and loved a boy, and she wanted to write about this bipolar kid. Just like one of the main characters in the book, Niven saw his daily struggles with the world and with himself and felt the urge to write about it within her first young adult book.

Brief Summary

Two high school students, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch meet on top of the school bell tower, where they both have gone to contemplate suicide by jumping off the building. And this is where the story first begins. The pair ends up not jumping and are, instead, paired up for a school project where they have to go explore the natural wonders of Indiana. As Violet and Theodore “wander” together, they start to open up to each other about their family, their past and start to give reasons as to why they wish to die. Although this seems like a typical love story, it is not since it battles topics like depression and suicide.

*All the Bright Places* Quotes

* “Because you smiled at me.” “What?” “You asked why I wanted to do this with you. It’s not because you were up on the ledge too, even though, okay, that’s part of it. It’s not because I feel this weird responsibility to keep an eye on you, which is also part of it. It’s because you smiled at me that day in class. A real smile, not the bullshit one I see you give everyone all the time where your eyes are doing one thing and your mouth is doing another.” “It was just a smile.” “Maybe to you” (101-102).
* This passage is crucial because this scene is where readers can sense that Theodore Finch is slowly developing a crush on Violet and starts to try to help her out of her sadness/depression. This quote also notions the idea that people should always reach out when they think that someone is in need of help.
* “I guess you can be yourself, whatever that means- the best and worst of you. And they love you anyway. You can fight, but even when you’re mad at them, you know they’re not going to stop being your friend” (128).
* This quote is important because it let’s the readers know that in times of need you should always reach out to your friends and that they will understand what you are going through. Friendship is a strong element within because Niven wants her readers to know that there is help everywhere around you.
* “You can’t do this to me. You were the one who lectured me about living. You were the one who said I had to get out and see what was right in front of me and make the most of it and not wish my time away and find my mountain because my mountain was waiting, and all that adds up to life. But then you leave. You can’t just do that” (341).
* I found this quote to be significant because it shows that one of the main characters (read to find out who) has committed suicide and the other main character is devastated by it. Both of the lives of these two characters was getting better. This quote is important because it tells the readers that having a “happy life” does not mean someone can’t be suicidal.

Why Teens Should Read This Book

* Teens facing mental health issues can relate to both Violet and Theodore.
* This novel can make teenagers feel safe enough to come forward and claim that they have a problem and that they need help.
* If the topic of suicide and depression is not brought up in class, how can we expect teenagers to reach out for help when they need it the most?
* This novel allows its readers to know that there is help out there, that your life will get better, that life is full of possibilities, and of course, that high school does not last forever.
* Teens are often pressured to get good grades, be a caretaker for their parents, to act a certain way, and to not have anything wrong with them. Many teens can’t see past their problems. Violet and Theodore will help show them that life can be dark and stressful, but there will always a bright place and that things will get better.

Class Discussion Questions/Activities

1. Have the class write about their “bright place.” Who or what place makes them feel the happiest and helps them believe in all the greatness life has to offer?
2. SSW: Have the students define their goals in life and write down something they are living for.
3. SSW question: Why do you think Niven ended the novel the way she did? Do you think it was the best way to end it?
4. Have the class group up in pairs just like Violet and Theodore, and assign a similar project where they are to go “wandering” within California.
5. Have the class pair up in groups of six and pick a scene from the book. Ask why they think this scene is important.

Text Complexity

Lexile: 740L-1010L

Grade Band: 4-5

Atos: 4.97

*All the Bright Places is shown to be within the 5th to 6th grade average. The book, quantitatively, is fairly easy to read and get through, but the meaning behind this book requires a more matured mindset to comprehend the novel’s message. This book, in my opinion, is great for readers aged 15 and up because it faces* real-life issues/topics. I think that most 13 and 14-year-olds are often not yet mature enough to get past the romance to value the severity of suicide and depression the novel is built around. The novel fits best in chapter four and five of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story* because this is a book about real-life experiences and about facing death and loss some examples from the novel include family and relationship issues, depression and suicide.

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English 112B