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English 112B

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Book Talk Presentation for *I’ll Give You the Sun* by Jandy Nelson

**Author Information/Biography**

Jandy Nelson, much like the characters in both of her major novels, came from a superstitious family. She was born on November 25, 1965 in the state of New York, and moved to California with her mom when she was twelve. The house they lived in overlooked the water, and closely resembles descriptions of the house in *I’ll Give You the Sun*. Nelson attended Cornell University where she studied creative writing and comparative literature, then proceeded to study French literature and literary theory in Paris for a year, traveling through the Sorbonne. After this she attended grad school at Brown University, where she studied poetry. Years later, she went to grad school again, where she studied writing for children and young adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She loves being in school, and plans on going back again to study art history. Nelson currently lives in San Francisco, where she has worked as a literary agent for the past thirteen years, representing authors’ writing for adults. Her interest in YA literature peaked during her second time in grad school. Prior to that, she had only written poetry, and never explored writing any fiction. One of Nelson’s greatest inspirations is Laurie Halse Anderson, and she is a fan of Speak, in particular.

<http://jandynelson.com/books/ill-give-you-the-sun/>

**Summary for *I’ll Give You the Sun***

*I’ll Give You the Sun* is Jandy Nelson’s second major YA novel. It tells the story of a pair of twins, Noah and Jude, who at first are inseparable, but grow apart after they experience a major tragedy in the family. Jude and Noah are one in the same, and also polar opposites of each other. Jude is a daredevil type, very charismatic and popular, while Noah is more quietly reserved. Both characters have a love for art, expressed in different ways, and realized at different points in time. *I’ll Give You the Sun* is a story about first loves, family struggles, sibling rivalries, and the brutality of life, told from the perspectives of both Jude and Noah, throughout different points in time. Noah narrates the early years, while Jude narrates the later years, after everything has changed. This novel explores how the two teens navigate through the tragedies and complexities of their young adult lives, how they use their art to express themselves, and how they find their way back to each other and themselves in the end.

**Important Passages from the Book**

1. “This is us. Our pose. The smush… I draw us as half people” (pp. 17-18).

This quote is from early on in the novel, where Noah is describing the relationship he shares with his twin sister. Noah and Jude are sitting in the living room listening to their parents fight in the next room over. This quote from Noah provides textual illustrations – that describe his literal illustrations – of his thoughts and feelings that support the image Nelson gives us of the twins sitting together, as one and as individuals at the same time.

1. “Jesus, Jude. How many diseases can you think you have in one night… I drew him, and he drew me. Sometimes now it feels like that” (pp. 145-146).

This passage provides an exchange of dialogue between Jude and Noah, broken up by narrations of Jude’s thoughts. It takes place during the later years, when the twins are 16, after they have experienced the major tragedy that changes them in the novel. This passage is significant because it describes the way Jude’s and Noah’s personalities and identities have switched.

1. “Dad drove us to the post office… This is why she can’t forgive me” (p. 305).

This passage describes one of the major instances of betrayal that Jude enacts on Noah. Both of the twins are applying to a prestigious art school, and Jude purposefully doesn’t put Noah’s in the mail, so he never gets in. Betrayal is a major theme throughout the story, and how each of the twins interprets, perpetrates, and overcomes it is crucial to how both characters develop through the story.

**4th Credit Enhancement – Evaluating the Author’s Style**

Jandy Nelson takes a unique approach to how she chooses to deliver Jude and Noah’s story. By making the two main characters twins, she establishes the idea that the two individuals share one split identity in the beginning. Nelson translates this through the text so that the story is delivered from two perspectives, each one incomplete until the very end. Nelson utilizes her chosen perspective to explore the ways the thoughts and personalities of the two characters shift back and forth throughout the story. The book has an almost *Speak*-like style approach, in the sense that half of it is delivered through narration, especially when the story is being told from Noah’s point of view. This gives readers an honest portrayal of both characters, so that their motives aren’t too ambiguous, and so that neither of the twins is difficult to empathize with. The story, largely, is all about art and how the creation and interpretation of art translates into the things we say and don’t say, and the things we do and don’t do. The importance of the visual arts in the story influence the vivid language Nelson uses to describe things like “bright blue fluorescent barf.” *I’ll Give You the Sun* is capable of fitting into any, and all, of chapters 4-7 of Adolescents in The Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story. The book very bluntly deals with real-life experiences; it explores different ways of facing death and loss; it discusses identity, discrimination, and struggles with decisions; and it is about courage and survival as well.

**Text Complexity Analysis**

The Lexile Measure for the text complexity of *I’ll Give You the Sun* is recommended for readers ages 14-17 which I believe is a fair measurement. The book deals with characters at the ages of 14 and 16, and discusses mature adolescent issues that would appeal to the age range. The reading isn’t dense at all, so the it would be an easy book to get through for younger readers, but the subject material wouldn’t be quite as impactful for those under the age of 14. The references in the book are also targeted to a more advanced audience. I’ll Give You the Sun embraces nearly all of the Exeter qualities that describe a good YA novel. The story also explores multiple different character archetypes. The one I thought to be most pronounced and significant was the Junex versus the Senex. Nelson depicts this archetype by giving Jude and Noah a parent that mirrors their personality, and a parent that is nothing like them. These roles shift throughout the story as Jude and Noah change.

“Or maybe a person is just made up of a lot of people. Maybe we’re accumulating these new selves all the time. Hauling them in as we make choices, good and bad, as we screw up, step up, lose our minds, find our minds, fall apart, fall in love, as we grieve, grow, retreat from the world, dive into the world, as we make things, as we break things.”