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Lit for Young Adults

Dr. Mary Warner

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All the Bright Places

By Jennifer Niven



(<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18460392-all-the-bright-places>)

About the Author

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



(<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/189467/jennifer-niven/>)

Niven is an Emmy Award-winning, New York Times Bestselling, and International bestselling author of her books. She is the author of multiple YA novels such as *Holding Up the Universe*, *Breathless*, & *All the Bright Places* which has now been turned into a movie adaptation on Netflix starring Elle Fanning and Justice Smith.

Summary:

Violet Markey was once a very popular girl at her high school until her sister/best friend was killed in a crash and she “completely changed” according to her friends. While Violet is trying to

grieve and comprehend what truly happened to her sister, Theodore (Finch) is oddly obsessed with the idea of death and is constantly thinking of ways to end his life. Through saving each other on the bell tower at school and a pairing of a class project, they start to bring joy into each other's lives again while also both experiencing and working through their mental health issues. Violet and Finch grow closer and closer each day but while Violet seems to be bettering herself, Finch is still sinking into his depression even more due to his household and family issues.

Quote #1

“The thing I don't say is: I want to stay alive. The reason I don't say it is because, given that fat folder in front of him, he'd never believe it...It's about never going to sleep again” (16). This quote gives the reader an insight into Theodore and his depression and some of his reasoning for his plan to commit suicide. Finch does not bother talking to the counselor about his thoughts because he believes the counselor has his mind made up about Finch and his depression. Finch believes he truly wants to stay alive and wants to fight to be better, but to him committing would give him control which he has never truly had due to his past traumas and family life.

Quote #2

“I look around the closet, at the comforter we're sitting on, at the pillows, the water jug, the energy bars, and that's when it hits me...I'm not claustrophobic, but when I open the door and walk back into my room, I feel like I can breathe again” (295). Violet discovers the severity of Finch and his depression after he describes his dark moods to her and reveals he has been living in the closet in his room. Ever since he was expelled from school, he has used his closet as a safe space and asked Violet to keep his secret. Violet gets worried for him and tries to

experience what it would be like to sit in her closet but feels suffocated. She can not fathom what Finch is going through for him to want to live in such a confined space alone. This moment slightly shows Violet's progression mentally as she has become closer to Finch but Finch's still deteriorating mental health.

Quote #3

"I set her glasses down on her dresser. 'Thanks for the loan,' I say. 'But they make my head hurt. And they're ugly.' I can almost hear her laughing (191). Since Violet has been grieving her sister Eleanor, Violet has been wearing Eleanor's glasses as a way to feel closer to her. She has not been able to fully grasp what occurred or go about her life without the grief fully taking over her. So this moment when she goes into Eleanor's room and sets the glasses down, shows the progress she has made with her grief and allowing it to be something that does not solely define who she is. Through Violet's new relationship with Finch, he has been able to help her deal with the depression that he has always dealt with allowing her to flourish and find herself again.

Use in a Classroom

If I were to use this novel in a classroom setting, I would most likely present it to a class of high school seniors as the novel touches on multiple worries and topics that older high school students experience. Themes of depression, suicide, and fear of the future are very prevalent throughout the novels but more specifically the characters, which students can personally relate to. Reading and learning about these taboo topics at this age would allow students to find something to relate to and not feel so alone in their thoughts, knowing that they are being represented in way they were not before. Speaking about these themes may also help a student in need reach out for help.

An idea for presenting the novel would be to participate in the “Before I Die...” wall in the novel and allow students to put theirs up on a wall if they feel comfortable doing so.

Chapter 4: Books About Real-Life Experiences

Theodore’s whole existence throughout the novel is a real-life experience for many people and many teens. As the story progresses, we are introduced to Finch and his backstory which has led to where he is today. Finch describes the unhealthy relationship he has with both his father and mother which is something that young teens experience. Finch’s father has a separate family in a nice house which Finch resents him for, his father has also made no attempt to grow a bond with Finch and constantly demeans him. Finch’s mother, on the other hand, is so tired and clueless that even though she is physically with Finch all the time at home, she does not seem to care for his or his siblings’ endeavors.

Chapter 5: Books About Facing Death and Loss

Both Violet and Theodore go through real-life experiences and feelings. Violet suffers from the tragic loss of a family member, her sister Eleanor. Grief is an emotion everyone goes through in their lives and Violet’s experiences with it are very relatable. The way she processes the fact that her sister is not around anymore and also the way she holds on to bits and pieces of Eleanor throughout the story are very realistic and very common. The months after the accident, Violet does not seem to be herself according to her family and friends at school. She cannot seem to go back to the way she was and finds herself in a deep depression, which is something that is new to her. Throughout the novel, she learns to manage and deal with her dark thoughts with Finch’s help.

Chapter 6: Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

All the Bright Places places a lot of emphasis on the idea of identity, especially in both Theodore and Violet as characters. Finch has always struggled with depression and also his place within a certain social circle at school. His peers have always considered him weird and a “freak” which he has learned to play off but still struggles with. Even when Violet asks him why he chose her for the project, he says it is because she smiled at him which shows he does not seem to experience any kindness from his classmates. Violet also experiences struggles with her identity, specifically after Eleanor’s accident. Violet was once a popular, bubbly girl but as the effects of her grief have taken over her, she has become more reserved and quiet which her friends are not used to. Her friends try to bring her back out and take her to parties but she is no longer interested. Because of this major change and the fact that she is hanging out with Theo, she starts to get judged by her peers as well.

Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival

The characters in the novel essentially try to survive their mental health and depression. Finch has been surviving his mental state since he was young and is now helping Violet survive her depression. They experience many things together while working on the “wandering project” which allows them to grow a closer bond and in the end helps Violet start to overcome her grief and depression. With Finch, she is also finally able to overcome her fear of cars which started after Eleanor’s crash. Both Violet and Finch teach each other courage in a multitude of ways that benefit each other.

Quantitative Levels

Word Count: 88,949

Page Count: 388

Dale-Chall: 5.62

Renaissance: 6.20

Qualitative Levels

When it comes to structure, the novel is set up as a dual-pov between Violet and Finch which is easy to follow along. The novel skips some days throughout the story which may confuse younger readers. An exeter quality the novel does embody the most is that it allows readers to engage with different characters and topics. The themes that are throughout the novel are not suitable for audiences younger than high school, which makes the qualitative level rise. There is a lot of discussion about suicide and also sexual references and scenes that seem to be written for an older young adult audience. There is also some inappropriate language that increases the level of quality as well.

