

Alondra Ibarra  
Engl. 112 B  
Book Talk

### ***Things We Know by Heart* by Jessi Kirby**



<http://kristinaspringer.blogspot.com/2012/05/girlfriends-cyber-circuit-starring.html>

Her webpage: [www.jessikirby.com](http://www.jessikirby.com)

Jessi Kirby grew up in Mammoth Lakes, California and earned a degree in English from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. She is an English teacher and novelist writer; and is also the author of six novels for young adults. Her novels have been published in more than 20 countries. She lives with her husband and two kids and she likes to spend time with her family. Kirby's first novel, *Moonglass* was written in Crystal Cove beach and that was where she began her career as a writer. She wrote the novels: *The Other Side of Lost*, *Things We Know by Heart*, *The Secret History of Us*, *In Honor*, and *Golden*.

"Jessi Kirby ." ABOUT, [www.jessikirby.com/about.html](http://www.jessikirby.com/about.html).

### **summary of the book**

Quinn is about to graduate high school and is in the process of applying to colleges until one day her boyfriend, Trent dies in a car accident. Five of his organs are donated to five different people. One of those organs is Trent's heart, which gets donated a boy named Colton. Quinn

reaches out to all of the receivers but when Colton refuses to answer Quinn's letter, it is Quinn who goes out to find him. *Things We Know by Heart* is a story about love, moving on, and honesty. Whether Quinn decides to fall in love with Colton or not, the story shares lots of mixed feelings and inspires those who are also in the process of moving on from someone who has passed away. This story teaches readers how to deal with guilt, the feeling that happens when a person moves on from a loved one.

## Quotes

**Quote # 1** is important because it demonstrates how a relationship can easily become damaged if honesty is not a mutual virtue. The importance of honesty is made clear when Colton grows angry at Quinn for not telling him who she really was. Apart from this, quote 1 is also important because it shows how affected a person becomes when they lose a loved one. This shows readers that it is normal to feel the need to become close to someone who is the receiver of the organs of a loved one. It is also okay to not want to know who the donor is because sometimes that kind of information can make the receiver feel guilty; guilty for having something that does not belong to him/her. Readers are able to see from this quote that the feeling is normal and ok.

"Wait," I plead. "Please. Let me explain--" He stops. Whips back around to face me. "Explain what? That you went looking for the person who got your boyfriend's heart? That you found me after I signed a paper that said I didn't want to be found?" Anger flashes over his face like, lightning over the ocean. "Or that you sat there next to me a few hours ago while I told you everything, and you said nothing?" He pauses, and something else flashes over his face. Maybe the memory of what came after that. But it's gone just as quickly, and his voice goes hollow. "Which part did you want to explain?" I open my mouth to explain, but the truth of what I've done leaves me speechless for a moment. And then I give the only explanation I can come up with. "You never wrote back." I say it to the floor, not an accusation, but the explanation for it all, in its most simple most honest form. "And why do you think? I never wanted this. I never wanted any of this." He looks directly into my eyes, and I swear I don't recognize him at all. "Do me a favor" he says. "Forget you knew me. Because I *never* should have known you." And then he's gone. Through the automatic doors, and into the night" (265-266).

**Quote # 2** is important because it demonstrates how sometimes when we feel empathy for others, it is because we have been in similar situations ourselves or we have most likely just experienced a similar feeling. In this case, Quinn is attracted to Colton because she hides things too, so she has been in a similar situation. This quote helps people to understand how relationships work. Relationships are made when there are similar emotional needs and similar qualities of personality shared in common. Because Colton is very similar to Trent and because he has a lot in common with Quinn, this quote shows exactly what those similarities are.

I feel for him in that moment--feel for him that he has to take whatever medications it is, and feel for him that it's something he thinks he needs to hide--that any of it is something he feels he needs to hide. But I'm hiding things too. It hits me then, why it's so easy to be around him, and why maybe it's the same for him with me: we don't have to acknowledge those things we want to keep hidden. Those things that define us to those who know us. We can be remade, without any loss or sickness. New to each other, and to ourselves" (161).

**Quote # 3** is important because it's the first time Quinn feels angry or hurt by Colton. She is offended at Colton for calling Trent "that guy." This quote is very relatable and many of us have felt like people don't have the right to talk about a loved one a certain way when they never even met the person. As a defender of a loved one, Quinn feels the need to protect Trent because he can't do it himself anymore because he is dead. This relatable quote strengthens the novel as it captures a serious emotional moment that touches the reader as well, making the reader feel what Quinn feels.

"Not a day goes by that I'm not reminded, over and over. How lucky I am. That I should be grateful. That I should be happy just to *be* here." He pauses, clears his throat. "That the only reason I am is because that guy--someone's boyfriend, son, brother, friend--died." His words, and the way he says "that guy" like Trent is a total stranger, knock the air out of me though I'm already down, crouched on my heels against the wall. A flicker of anger lights up somewhere in me now too--at him and at myself. Out of all the rules I broke to find Colton, withholding Trent's name in the letter was the one I actually followed. Now I wish I hadn't. I wish I'd written it all down, every detail of who Trent was, so he'd know who "that guy" was. Maybe then he would've written back" (231).

### **How to teach this novel**

If I were to teach this novel to children, I would teach it to kids that are in their freshman year of high school because they are likely to be in a stage where they are emotionally very needy. That is, they depend on relationships more when they are in this age. Friends, boyfriends and girlfriends, maybe certain family members, become increasingly important to teenagers as they look to someone to share their feelings and concerns with. Teenagers who have lost one of these important relationships should read this book to learn how to move on in a healthy manner and find happiness elsewhere. This book teaches teens how to not feel guilty for moving on. This book fits into chapter four of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*. Chapter four focuses on Books about real life experiences and that is just what *Things We Know by Heart* is all about.

One way to teach this book is by introducing it with a poem by Emily Dickinson, "If I Can Stop One Heart From Breaking", which is a poem about relationships and living optimistically. This poem can be used to introduce the theme of the unit of study. The book *The Fault in Our Stars*- by John Green could be used to compare the themes that both texts have in common. A film called *Beginners* directed by Mike Mills is also an option for the students to write about the theme of loss and compare it with other texts. I would have the students write about their own experiences with loss too.

### **Text Complexity**

The complexity of the text is appropriate for middle school and up stages. The novel is fast paced, which makes it easy for students with short attention spans. The novel is based on real life situations, making it easy for students to connect and identify with the characters. The plot is interesting and it consists of lots of plot twists which is another reason why kids would want to read it. While the text is easy to read, the content is also easy to understand. This makes it a completely approachable text for any ages mature enough to understand the idea of loss and redemption. Finally, the text is completely relatable and that is really, its primary strength.