*Things We Know by Heart*

 

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**Author Information / Biography:**

Jessi Kirby, 41, grew up in Mammoth Lakes, California and currently lives in Orange County, California with her husband and two kids. Kirby earned her degree in English from Cal Poly San Louis Obispo and between publishing her six novels, worked as a middle school librarian. Kirby spends her time enjoying her family, teaching, writing, running, reading and trying to make the most out of every day. *Things We Know by Heart, History of Us, Moonglass, In Honor, Golden,* and *The Other Side of Lost* are her six novels written for young adults and have been published in more than twenty countries. Kirby’s novels have received starred reviews from Booklist and Publishers Weekly and her first novel, *Moonglass* was nominated for the ABA New Voices Award.

**Book Summary**

Quinn Sullivan calls herself an eighteen-year-old widow. She lost the love of her life, Trent, in an unexpected accident in their junior year of high school. Overtaken by grief, she becomes depressed and stops doing everything she once loved and sits alone in her room. After reaching out to all of the recipients of Trent’s donated organs, Quinn thought she would feel better, but after not hearing back from the person who got his heart, she becomes fixated on finding them. After 400 days of searching, Quinn hunts down nineteen-year-old Colton Thomas. Colton has spent the last five years of his life in and out of the hospital, sometimes inches from death, waiting to receive a heart transplant. Colton wants to forget about his sick past and move on, not knowing anything about the person who had to die so he could live. After what was supposed to be an innocent encounter made by Quinn turns into something deeper, Quinn struggles with how to go about telling Colton about how they are connected. Coltons love for life and spontaneity is what attracts Quinn to him but she knows that their relationship is built on a lie if she does not confess to Colton.

**Significant Quotes**

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| “Writing the letters made me feel like I could breathe again. I wrote about Trent and all the things he’d given me when he was alive. The feeling I could do anything. Happiness. Love. The letters were a way to honor him, and a hope for something more. An anonymous hand reaching out into the emptiness, looking for a connection. An answer” (Page 7). | This quote showcases Quinn’s reason for reaching out to the recipients of Trent’s organs. Her grieving for Trent was unrelenting and affected her life completely. Quinn was depressed and thinking about Trent for the majority of the book, her thoughts always rotated on different levels of missing him. She was completely devastated after Trent’s death and was willing to do anything to find a way to feel better and hear answers.  |
| “What I mean is how does he somehow know to show me things I didn’t realize I needed to see, or take me places I wouldn’t have guessed I needed to go? When Trent died, it was like I took a step back from life altogether because I saw how fragile it really is. But Colton- he’s pulling me back in the moment we met. Showing me the beautiful side of every same truth” (Page 208). | An important part of Quinn and Colton’s relationship is that Colton’s had a deep love for life and a positive attitude about everything. He is happy and bright and Quinn lived in a dark place before she knew Colton. Colton makes her feel happy and warm again and puts her back out on the playing field of life. |
| “He stops only to roll on his side and pull me into him for a kiss. And in that kiss is one of those moments like we had in the hospital that day. A moment that is everything. It’s a moment when I can feel the depth of the connection between Colton and me, between it all. I can feel the endless rhythms of light and dark, the tides and the winds. Life and death, and guilt and forgiveness. And love. Always love. We lie together, quiet, under an endless sky beside a bottomless ocean, and we don’t talk about how these are all the things that brought us together. We don’t talk about how we would change any of them. We don’t have to, because these are the things we know by heart” (Page 291).  | Spoiler alert: The relationship that Colton and Quinn share is more complex than the secrets that they kept from one another. Their connection is built on a deeper level which brought them together much easier than both of them could have ever imagined. They both had pasts that they were trying to forget and run from, and when they were together, they did not have to try to run anymore, for them, it was easy to be together. Quinn no longer felt depressed or even worried about counting another day without Trenton. Colton felt normal with Quinn and wanted to spend every minute he could with her doing what he loved; laying on the beach under star being thankful for the life he was given. The title of the book is also mentioned, bringing the meaning of it full circle.  |

***Adolescents in Search for Meaning***

* **Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences**
	+ Experiencing death and finding love are both very real experiences for many teenagers. For Quinn, losing Trent and finding love again was something that she thought would never happen. She had big ideas about prom and college for them, and when she realized that he was gone, her life stopped along with Trent’s. Many teenagers go through both the loss of a loved one and feel the emptiness of grief. Many teenagers also experience finding their first love at this age - a first love that they believe will last forever. Depression and secrecy are also themes of this novel that adolescents can relate too. A novel showcasing both expierences might be very helpful for some teenagers.
* **Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss**
	+ The entirety of the novel is based on the fact that Quinn lost her boyfriend Trent. Her every move revolves around the fact that she has to live another day without him. While Kirby made this novel heavily a romance one, it still touches on the fact that Quinn was in a very dark and depressed state that even her own family struggled to get her out of. Any adolescents who are experiencing something similar might find comfort in reading this novel.

**Text Complexity**

**Lexile:** 840l

**Age Range:** 14-17

**ATOS:** Level: 5.3

 **Interest level:** Upper Grades (UG 9-12)

 **AR Points:** 10.0

I believe that this book is best suited for 8-12 graders. The themes of the novel are easy for any reader in the age group to comprehend and can be used as a helping mechanism for those who can relate to the themes. The novel is easy to read and although it is about two people who are eighteen and nineteen, the content of the work is not inappropriate for a younger reader to experience. The novel does not use complex language and diction, but does talks about depression, death, and has a sex scene.

**Her other novels:**

    

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Jessi Kirby’s novels are perfect for young readers as they deal with romance, finding oneself, death, depression, and everything in between. I really enjoyed reading this book and will begin reading more of her works.