*All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven



<https://www.penguin.com.au/authors/jennifer-niven>

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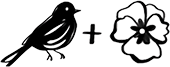
Jennifer Niven

* Website: <http://www.jenniferniven.com>
* She started writing in 2000 and has written nine books since then.
* The founder of the [*Germ*](http://www.germmagazine.com/) web magazine, which is mentioned in *All the Bright Places*.
* She has written nonfiction and fiction, both historical and contemporary, adult and YA. *All the Bright Places* is her debut YA novel.
* Also, she has created a blog [EleanorandViolet.com](http://www.eleanorandviolet.com/), based off the blog created by the protagonist and her sister in *All the Bright Places*.
* Niven based *All the Bright Places* off experiences in her own life.

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Synopsis

Theodore Finch thinks of ways he could die every day, but every day he also searches for a reason to live. Violet Markey struggles to move on after her sister’s tragic death, which she blames herself for. All she can do is count off the days until graduation. Then she can finally run away from her guilt. The two of them meet on the ledge of the school’s bell tower, both debating death. Finch, the social pariah, talks down the most popular girl in school. However, it is not clear who is truly the one that has been saved. The duo is partnered for a class project to discover the “natural wonders” in their home state Indiana. In their adventure Violet remembers what it is like to enjoy living life. While, Finch finds someone he can be himself with. But, as Violet’s world expands Finch’s diminishes.



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Quotes

* “*Everything is fine. You are fine…*This is what I want to do with Violet—give her only the good, keep away the bad, so that good is all we ever have around us,” (167-168)
  + *Significance*: This excerpt in the beginning allows the readers to see through the lens of Finch as he struggles with his bipolar tendencies. He questions if he has changed. He is not the same person, and is unfamiliar to himself. The bad feelings, or one of his episodes of depression, threaten to ruin his happiness with Violet. Because of this he cuts out happy phrases from magazines and tapes them to his wall. All he wants is to share his good side with Violet. He pushes himself to fight off the imminent illness that he can’t cure, because he only wants to give his good side to Violet. This shows Finch’s desperation. In the beginning of the novel he shares that he has never experienced the perfect day, and wishes to one day experience that. In the same way, he wants everything with Violet to be perfect. He wants to be perfect for her. However, he constantly battles with himself and his bipolar episodes.
* “I feel the way his hand, warm and firm, fits around mine…And I slam out the door knowing full well he can’t follow me, even though I tell myself: *If he really loves you, he’ll find a way*,” (305-307)
  + *Significance*: This scene is the pivotal climax to Finch’s fall into his depression. Previous to this Finch had been in a fight at school because of an episode of anger, got expelled, tried to commit suicide and failed, and has secluded himself to his closet. Violet is his only source of happiness by this point, but he does not want to acknowledge he has a problem either. He does not take any medication because he is a person, not defined by a diagnosis. Yet, this is what further drags him into his illness. His trauma from having a terrible home-life, and being misunderstood at school eats away at him. In this scene, he closes out his last source of brightness, Violet. Desperately, Violet begs for him to let her help him, but he refuses her coldly. This shows that sometimes no matter how much a person may want to provide a life line to another, if that person is not willing to take it then there is not much that can be done. Finch has been plagued by his abusive dad, uncaring mother, toxic sister, and peers that have encouraged him to kill himself. Violet may have been able to save him a little bit from his depression, but she could not do it by herself.
* “And now I know why Finch chose this place—for Eleanor and for me… The thing I realize is that it’s not what you take, it’s what you leave,” (374-376).
  + *Significance*: This moment is significant because it is when Violet finally comes to terms with her guilt towards Eleanor and Finch’s death. Finch’s letter tells her that she made him feel lovely, she made him feel loved. Perhaps he is not still alive, but for that time they were together she made him happy and feel like he wanted to live. Violet is able to forgive herself for the deaths she felt responsible for. She realizes that it is not about what a person takes, but what they leave behind. Finch took himself out of her life permanently, but the memories they made and the happiness they gave each other is permanently left behind in her heart.

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Why Should Teens Read This?

* This is a book that addresses various issues such as depression, bipolar disorder, abuse, bullying, and suicide. These are all issues that are often considered taboo, or too heavy to think about. However, *All the Bright Places* acknowledges these topics in a novel that contains sweet humor, and courtesy of its title “bright places”. This book provides an easier to digest story for teenagers to comprehend and relate real life issues to.
* A sense of hopefulness is evoked in this story. While the story contains a list of events that make things get from bad to worse, there is also an after taste of hope to it. The story’s ending could be considered a sad ending, however, the lesson that is learned in the end is optimistic. For teenagers, the positive ending can also be a source of good faith. The new perspective Violet gains in the end could also change the perspective of the teenagers who read the story.
* Furthermore, what Violet learns in the end is to not blame herself. Her sister’s death in the car accident was not her fault, and neither was Finch’s suicide. This is a lesson that many teenagers could find solace in. At a young age, it is easy to inflict self-punishment, which Violet does throughout the entire story. In the end, she realizes that these deaths were not her fault. Also, in Finch’s case she was one of the only reasons he wanted to stay alive. This is an important epiphany for many readers to have, because it is common to daily assert self-blame for uncontrollable events.
* The dual perspectives between Violet and Finch creates a dynamic story that is a good read. The diversity also shows the conscious of both characters. Especially Finch, who exhibits his bipolar tendencies as he stops taking his medication. This provides an insight to his tornado of emotions that are inflicted upon Violet.
* Lastly, this story shares information for other sites, such as the [*Germ*](http://www.germmagazine.com/). This is a web magazine that Violet creates at the end of the story, and Niven has created in real life. Thus, it is a real website that young adults, or anyone for that matter, can go to and find articles about literature, life, style, bright places, and so on. The site’s goal is to cover high school and beyond: real thoughts, real writing, and real life. Anyone can submit their own poetry, letters, and writing—gifts for their past, present, and future selves, and anyone that needs it.

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**In the Classroom**

* Since Violet and Finch had the assignment to discover the “natural wonders” in their state, I could have my students do something similar. I would give my students the assignment to identify three wonders in our town. The idea of Violet and Finch finding the bright places in the dreary town they both didn’t appreciate buttresses the theme of valuing the nice things that already surround you. This theme can be solidified from a more personal perspective for my students if I were to give this assignment.
* One of Finch’s characteristics is that he puts things on his wall, or sticky notes with things that have been said to him, which hold meaning to him. I would give my students the assignment to go through the book and find out what are some of the things on his wall, and how do they describe his character or themes present in the novel.
* Another activity I could do with my students involves Violet’s web magazine the *Germ*. Because this magazine is real, I would have my students go on the website and look through the written works published by young adults. I would have them pick the work that resonates most with the novel, and write a deeper analysis about how the writing parallels with Niven’s story. Furthermore, we could discuss some of the poems on the website published by the readers, and how they offer evidence of the novel’s significance.

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**Text Complexity**

* *Qualitative*
  + Lexile: Ages 14-17. 830L
  + ATOS: 5.3. Grade Level 9-12.
  + Dale-Chall Readability: Grade Level 5-6. Final score 5.5.
* *Quantitative* 
  + The novel paralleled with Exeter Quality #7: Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.
    - The character Violet punishes herself for the death of her sister Eleanor, and struggles to move on from the tragedy. The themes of depression, death, and how young adults may trifle with these are present in the novel. However, through the journey Violet goes on with Finch, young adults can learn how to cope with those very real issues.
* *Reader and Task*
  + This novel provides characters for young readers or students to identify with, and gives room for them to recognize their own sources of darkness. Although, this story also can encourage young adults to find the sources of brightness in their lives .This book can open up a conversation of healing for the young adults reading it because it touches upon hard topics. The topics of death, suicide, and depression are what make me believe this book should be read in grades 8-12th. The age groups in these grades would most likely be mature enough and emotionally able to understand the concepts in the novel.

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***Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story***

* Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences (Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living through Family and Relationship Issues)
  + Finch is cornered by his bipolar depression, and is traumatized by the physical abuse he received from his father in the past. This plagues his relationship with Violet.
  + Violet faces the guilt of her sister’s death, and how she was the only survivor of their car accident, the whole story. Finally, at the end, she also has to face Finch’s death and her guilt for not being enough to keep him alive.
  + Violet has to learn that these events were out of her control. Even if she moves on from her sister’s death that does not mean she will love her any less. Furthermore, even if Finch killed himself that was not her fault. Rather, she was the person who gave him a reason to live longer than he imagined he could.
* Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss
  + Violet struggles to face the death of her sister, and has to learn to accept her death. Furthermore, she has to realize that her sister’s death is not her fault.
  + Violet also has to face Finch’s death at the end of the novel. This death also is hard on Violet because she blames herself. However, similar to how her sister’s death was not her fault neither was Finch’s.