

*These  
Shallow  
Graves by  
Jennifer  
Donnelly*

Citlalli Acevedo-Adame

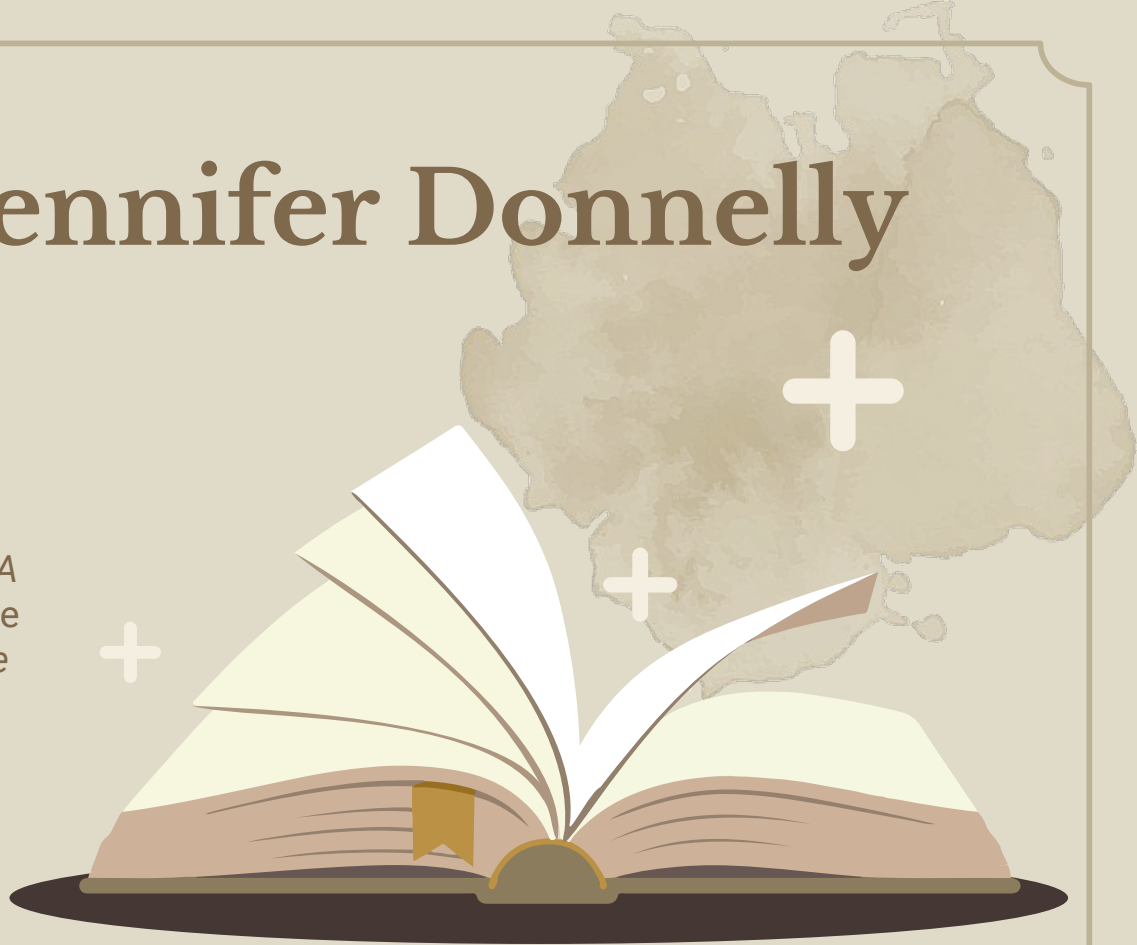


# 01 About Jennifer Donnelly

Donnelly was born in Port Chester, New York. She majored in English Literature and European History at the University of Rochester and graduated *magna cum laude*.

She is best known for her novel *Northern Light*, which won the Carnegie Medal in 2003, and it was named *Time Magazine's* 100 Best Young Adult Books of All Time in 2015.

To learn more about Donnelly and her novels, visit her site <https://www.jenniferdonnelly.com/>.



# 02 Summary



Josephine Montfort has everything. She is beautiful, her family has money, and her future engagement will ensure that her wealth continues increasing, but she doesn't have what she wants the most: freedom.

Jo wants to be a reporter, and she tries to be, secretly. Her world changes completely when her dear father is found dead. She is not satisfied with the reasons behind his death, so she searches for the truth, meeting people from a world so different from hers that she must question her identity, the value of her actions, and what she will decide to do.



# 03 Significant Quotes





# Quote #1

“Who would you have if they *both* asked you to marry them, right at the same time, and you had to choose?”

‘But that’s the thing, I *can’t* choose,’ Jo said despairingly.

‘But if you *could*.’

Jo didn’t want to answer the question. Fay deep. was digging deep. Too deep.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ Jo finally said, trying to sound nonchalant. ‘You tell me. Whom should I choose? What’s better—security or love?’

Fay didn’t reply right away. Instead she looked out over the East River for a bit; then, in a voice raw with longing, said, ‘*This* is the best thing, Jo. The city stretched out before you, glittering like a sack of diamonds. Yours for the taking. A drink and a smoke and one to please but yourself. Freedom. That’s my answer. The freedom to be your own best thing.’

Without any warning, tears came to Jo’s eyes. Neither of them could choose their future, it was true—but Jo knew that the life she would have as Bram’s wife, or the wife of any of a number of the city’s golden boys, would be paradise compared to the one Fay was facing” (289-290).



# Importance

Jo realizes the hopelessness of her situation a couple of times throughout the novel, but this is the first time she thinks about what it means for her. This conversation encourages her to think more deeply about what she will need to do, but this conversation also brings her closer to Fay, her only true friend. Fay is the first person Jo opens up to, and while their futures don't look too bright, they are not as lonely as they were before.



<https://foryouaesthetics.com/blogs/news/dark-academia>





## Quote #2

“‘What does one do?’ she asked. ‘How does one go on after something like this?’

Her voice, so small and bewildered, broke Jo's heart.

[...]

‘We *must* be strong, Anna. This awfulness will pass. Come summer, we'll have a beautiful wedding at Herondale. With a lovely couple to toast and a new beginning to celebrate. And it *will* be beautiful, won't it, Jo?’

Jo gazed at her aunt's hopeful face. She looked at her mother—always so straight-backed, always so strong—struggle like a wounded animal. As she did, Jo's resolve drained away. How could she break her mother's heart? Her entire family's?

‘Yes, Aunt Maddie,’ she said, utterly defeated. ‘It will’” (365).



# Importance

Jo debates whether she should go through the marriage her family planned for her or leave that world. Just as she starts stepping out of her cage, heartbreaking news about her father's death destroys her chance. Seeing her mother so heartbroken puts Jo in a dilemma. Should she follow through with the proposal, or should she take control of her life? She must choose between herself and her family, but seeing as her family continues to fall apart, she decides to follow her duty rather than her dreams.



<https://twitter.com/thedarkacademia>





## Quote #3

"'You're engaged to Abraham Aldrich, are you not? No doubt your dear mama--if she's worth a damn--tallied the fortunes prospects of every young man of means in the city, weighing their dollars against your assets: beauty and breeding.' She paused to let her words sink in, then said, 'One day soon, my darling, you'll be doing the very same thing the girls here do, only *you* won't get for it.'

[...]

And suddenly Jo saw her engagement to Bram for what it was: a business deal, and she was the commodity that had been traded. She didn't love Bram. And he didn't love her. He cared for her in his way, as she did for him. But it wasn't love. It wasn't what she felt for Eddie" (358-359).





# Importance

This is yet another instance where Jo sees her life as it is. Not only does she fail in saving Fay from a life as a prostitute, but she also faces the reality that their futures might not be too different. Both of them are dehumanized and thought of as nothing but objects to make more money.

If she chooses to follow her duty, Jo will never have something as genuine as what she feels for Eddie; there is yet another dilemma. Should she follow her duties and be commodified, or should she try to leave that world again and follow her dreams?

# 04 Text Complexity

## Dale-Chall Readability Score

- ❖ Raw score 2.3387
- ❖ Adjusted Score:  $(3.6365 + 2.3387)$
- ❖ Final Score: 6
- ❖ Grade level: Grades 7 - 8

The novel's structure, language, and cultural references are not difficult to understand, so in that respect, seventh and eighth graders could read this. However, the themes are a bit too heavy for children that age. There are a lot of references to suicide, mental institutions, and prostitution. I would prefer to teach this story to older students--ninth-graders at the youngest--, who I think will get more meaning out of the darker themes.

## Lexile Range: 610 - 800L

Lexile scored the novel as "Upper Level" based on word length and sentence length. One of the sentences was a list, so that's probably why the score was higher. However, judging by the language only, I think Dale-Chall's readability score is more accurate--middle schoolers could easily read the novel.



05

Relevant Themes  
from *Adolescents in  
the Search for  
Meaning*



## Chapter 5: Book about Facing Death and Loss

What starts Jo's investigation is the death of her father. She must face realities that change her perspective of the world she lives in and the people in it. Although she continues searching for the truth about her father's death because she wants justice, her behavior becomes obsessive, and she has to learn how to process her emotions.



## Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

What Jo wants for herself and what her family and society expect from her are very different things. She loves her family, but she is also unhappy with the life that she was born into as the daughter of a wealthy family. As her search continues, she learns more about what it means to be free, and she realizes that she is not. Eventually, she has to decide between her family and what they stand for, and herself.





06

Why Should Teens  
Read it?





<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/style/dark-academia-tiktok.html>

This book encourages independence. Jo is the perfect example of a sheltered child, and although her parents have good intentions, she is not happy with her life. High schoolers are at the age where they are still learning about life, but the adults around them expect them to act like adults. This book perfectly exemplifies the stress that comes from transitioning from an adolescent to an adult.

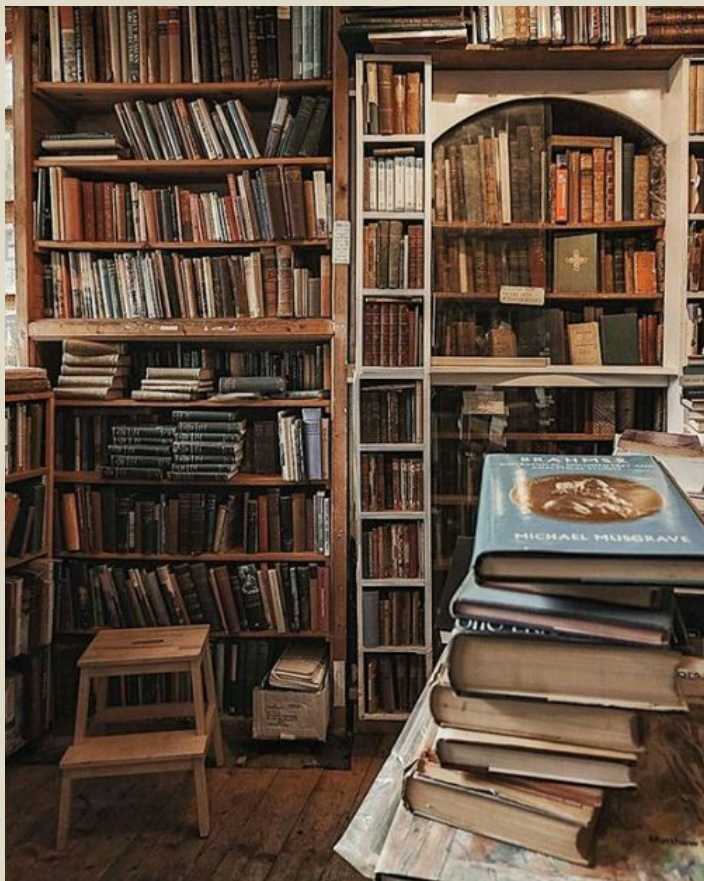


# 07 In a Classroom ++

Due to the mature themes, high school level would be the most appropriate. High school juniors are nearing graduation, and they are likely deciding not only what college to attend but also what to do with their lives. I would teach this book as a supplement for a unit of study about identity



<https://www.grazia.co.in/fashion/dark-academia-the-latest-trend-combining-aesthetics-with-intellect-6169.html>



<https://weheartit.com/entry/338113821>



This book demonstrates how familial love can be draining for a young adult, so I would have the students write a personal essay.

I would encourage them to write about how they saw aspects of Jo in themselves. What are they interested in, and what is stopping them from pursuing those interests? If they don't have any external barriers, then what about internal barriers?

This would be a good opportunity for them to reflect on what they want to do with their futures. If they find that they have been living for their families, they might start thinking more about what they could do to take ownership of their lives.





# Thanks



Do you have any questions?

[youremail@freepik.com](mailto:youremail@freepik.com)

+91 620 421 838

[yourcompany.com](http://yourcompany.com)

CREDITS: This presentation template was  
created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by  
**Flaticon**, infographics & images by **Freepik**

Please keep this slide for attribution

