



2015

All the Bright Places

Aylea Stephens

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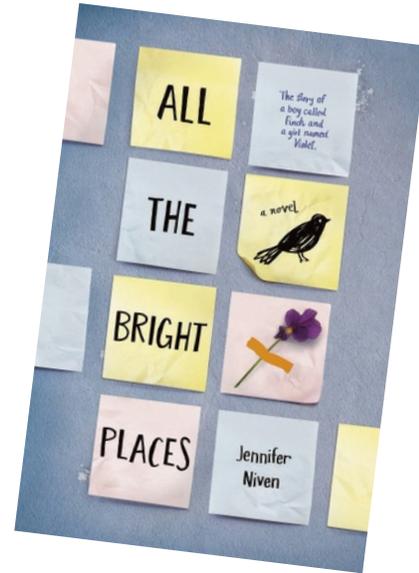
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Stephens, Aylea (2015) "All the Bright Places," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 5 , Article 7.
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Book Review

Title: All the Bright Places
Author: Jennifer Niven
Reviewer: Aylea Stephens
Publisher: Knopf
Publication Year: 2015
ISBN: 9780385755887
Number of Pages: 388
Interest Level: Young Adult
Rating: Significant Shortcomings



Review

Theodore Finch is fascinated by death, and he spends a lot of time thinking about ways that he might kill himself and if it is a good day to die. He meets Violet Markey on the ledge of the bell tower at school. They talk to each other enough to prevent either from jumping off, and later Finch requests that Violet be his partner for a project to discover the natural wonders of the state. Finch helps Violet deal with the recent death of her sister, and the two of them come together with their mutual difficulties. As Violet begins to heal, however, Finch's world gets more difficult and Violet has to discover all the bright places on her own.

All the Bright Places looks cheerful from the cover and the title, but it is anything but. It deals with difficult issues like abuse, suicide, death, mental illness, and substance abuse. It seems to be written from the perspective of helping those who lose someone to suicide, but the message for someone struggling with suicidal thoughts seems to be that there is no hope, adults cannot be trusted with problems, and if you kill yourself in the right way at least your death can be inspirational to others. The adults in the book ignore the very serious issues that Violet and Finch face, but neither of them are open with the adults in their lives either, which contributes to the tragic ending. The characters are treated as descriptions of mental illnesses instead of real people for a good portion of the book. Finch starts out as a complex character, but evolves into a "manic pixie dream boy" trope. The writing is gripping and intense, but the difficult themes of this book were not handled well.

*Contains strong language, abuse, sexual content, and discussions about suicide