

*All The Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven

Student Reviewer: Massara Butrus, Grade 10

For anyone who enjoys reading coming-of-age books with just the right amount of troubled teen romance, *All The Bright Places*, by Jennifer Niven, will certainly be one book you can't put down.

The story follows two polar-opposite teens who are each troubled in their own way and realize that they might have more in common with each other than anyone would have thought. Violet Markley is one of the popular girls in school, the so-called "Queen Bee". Everybody knows and loves Violet. However, following a tragic event in her life, Violet is not feeling like herself. She quits all her extracurriculars and struggles with her academic studies, but everybody seems to be more concerned about her academic success than her mental well-being. Violet dreads living in her small Indiana town and is counting the days until graduation.

Theodore Finch is also popular in school, but for all the wrong reasons. He is a troubled teen who is targeted in school by Violet's friend group and is often called "Theodore Freak". He suffers from depression and suicidal thoughts through his "Awake" period. Unlike Violet, Theodore has no escape because he is abused by his father at home. All these difficulties worsen his mental health and he counts the days until his death. Every day he wakes up and wonders if it would be a good day to die.

After Violet and Theodore are grouped for a semester-long project, they begin to bond through their adventures and Theodore starts to help Violet heal from her trauma. However, as Violet learns to start living the days instead of counting them, Theodore's mental health begins to deteriorate as he deals with his depression, undiagnosed bipolar disorder, and suicidal thoughts. The only bright place in his life seems to be his relationship with Violet. However, their relationship takes a downfall when their parents and friends oppose it. And as Violet begins to heal, Theodore is unsure whether he is as needed in her life as he supposed. Just as the two of them begin to find a purpose in life, they start to realize that through the darkest times, there are bright places to be found. However, are these bright places real, or are they illusions in threat of disappearing at any moment?

This meaningful and deep novel is an emotional rollercoaster with intense plot twists and cliffhangers that young adult readers will love. It is a novel so intense and exciting you won't want to put it down but, at the same time, need to pause to process the story. *All the Bright Places* reduces stigma around mental illness, encourages professional support, and spurs discussion around mental health. Not only is it a novel teenagers can relate to, but it's also an extremely important one because the first step to healing begins when talking happens.