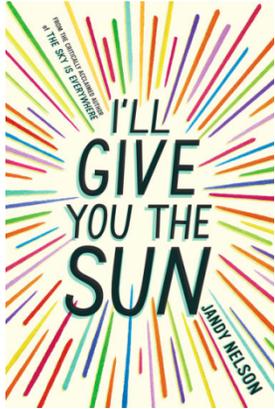


A BOOK REVIEW OF *I'LL GIVE YOU THE SUN* BY JANDY NELSON (2014)

by Heather Reid

Rating: ★★★★★



Jandy Nelson's 2015 Michael Printz Award winning novel, *I'll Give You the Sun*, is a masterpiece of young adult literature that sometimes feels like an actual, physical, artistic masterpiece. It tells the story of Noah and Jude, a pair of twins who, at 13, are incredibly close. They share every connection that a twin could possibly share, and

often seek a physical one-ness, smushing their bodies together in order to become one Noah and Jude as they make it through hard or scary times.

Noah tells his side of the story, from his 13-year-old perspective. His words overflow with artistic metaphor, evoking colour and movement and beauty with every turn of phrase. He tells us about his life that summer: about Brian, the new boy next door; about his overwhelming desire to get into an art school, where he feels he really belongs; about his incredible relationship with his mother, how much he loves her and strives to impress her; about Jude, of course – her wildness, her cliff-jumping and rebellion and red lipstick, and her super blonde hair; and about how everything slowly starts to fall apart. And then the unthinkable happens at the end of the summer – his mother is killed in a freak car accident.

We get the rest of the story from Jude, three years later when the twins are 16. Their roles have reversed – Noah has become popular and “normal,” has done away with art, and is thriving in the world of organized sports and partying. Jude has completely drawn into herself, sworn off boys, and is going to that art school that Noah had so coveted. In the wake of the extreme tragedy of their mother's death, everything is a mess and instead of coping with it, they've simply become strangers – to themselves and to each other.

When Jude seeks the mentorship of a very private and “retired” local artist, things begin to change. She finds herself in her art, she is able to forgive herself for what happened during her 13th summer – for what she was doing when her mother died, for the reason that she got into art school and Noah did not – and she realizes how vital it is to amend her relationship with her brother.

I'll Give You The Sun depicts so many youth experiences so beautifully and realistically. It shows us the struggle of coming out as a teenager -- how scary and impossible that can seem. It shows us the importance of family, love, and forgiveness. It shows us the confusion and shame associated with sexual assault. And, most of all, it shows us the story of two young people who are so absolutely destroyed by loss and grief that they become unrecognizable. However, through this book Nelson shows us how you can still come back from that loss and pain. More than anything else, *I'll Give You the Sun* is a testament to the strength and resilience of young people.

The loss of a parent is one of the hardest experiences a young teenager could go through, and Noah and Jude spend the majority of the novel lost, giving in to whatever happens to them, letting life and other people call the shots. But, in the final moments, when it's sink or swim and when it really counts, they are able to gather themselves, to overcome the horrible tragedies that life has dealt them, and to come back to who they really are. Even in the darkest of times, they never truly lose sight of themselves and who they are. *I'll Give You The Sun* sends a message to teens that it is okay to suffer, to be sad and become a stranger to yourself; it is okay because this suffering and sadness does not have to be permanent. Even when your world seems totally hopeless, there is always a way out. You can always find yourself in the end.

Works Cited

Jandy, N. (2014). *I'll give you the sun*. New York: Penguin Young Readers Group.