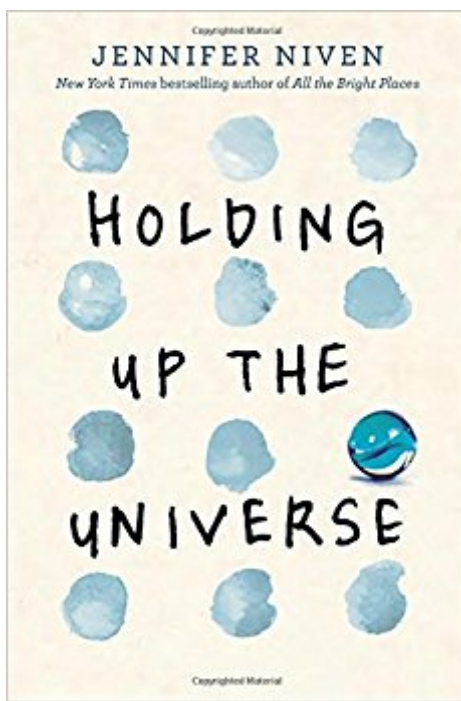


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Holding Up The Universe



Synopsis

From the author of the New York Times bestseller *All the Bright Places* comes a heart-wrenching story about what it means to see someone—and love someone—for who they truly are. Everyone thinks they know Libby Strout, the girl once dubbed “America’s Fattest Teen.” But no one’s taken the time to look past her weight to get to know who she really is. Following her mom’s death, she’s been picking up the pieces in the privacy of her home, dealing with her heartbroken father and her own grief. Now, Libby’s ready: for high school, for new friends, for love, and for EVERY POSSIBILITY LIFE HAS TO OFFER. In that moment, I know the part I want to play here at MVB High. I want to be the girl who can do anything. Everyone thinks they know Jack Masselin, too. Yes, he’s got swagger, but he’s also mastered the impossible art of giving people what they want, of fitting in. What no one knows is that Jack has a newly acquired secret: he can’t recognize faces. Even his own brothers are strangers to him. He’s the guy who can re-engineer and rebuild anything in new and bad-ass ways, but he can’t understand what’s going on with the inner workings of his brain. So he tells himself to play it cool: Be charming. Be hilarious. Don’t get too close to anyone. Until he meets Libby. When the two get tangled up in a cruel high school game—which lands them in group counseling and community service—Libby and Jack are both pissed, and then surprised. Because the more time they spend together, the less alone they feel. . . . Because sometimes when you meet someone, it changes the world, theirs and yours. Jennifer Niven delivers another poignant, exhilarating love story about finding that person who sees you for who you are—and seeing them right back. “I’ve never fallen in love with characters as fast as I fell for Libby and Jack. Appreciating people for who they are—and who they can be—comes alive when a boy who can’t recognize faces and a girl once named “America’s Fattest Teen” let themselves connect. *Holding Up the Universe* is a beautiful reminder of the power of understanding.” —Jay Asher, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Thirteen Reasons Why* “Gorgeously written and oh-so-deeply felt, *Holding Up the Universe* contains one of my favorite characters of all time! You will absolutely fall in love with Libby Strout!” —Nicola Yoon, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Everything, Everything* “At once hilarious and achingly poignant, Jennifer Niven’s *Holding up the Universe* brims with love and heart and hope. A gorgeous, life-affirming book that—like its lovable and resilient main character, Libby—will make you want to open your arms wide, lift your face to the sky, and twirl.” —Kerry Kletter, author of *The First Time She Drowned*

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Customer Reviews

Popular boy meets unpopular girl; betrays her; redeems himself. It's a tale as old as time, the subject of countless teen movies and novels, but what makes it work is the details. In this case, each kid is dealing with a doozy of a detail, that gives the book a unique perspective. Libby, the "unpopular" girl, is returning for her junior year of high school after having been homeschooled for a number of years. After her mother's death, when she was 11, Libby ate herself up to 600 pounds and ultimately had to be lifted by a crane out of her home. Since then, she's been in hospitals and intense therapy sessions, and has just worked up the nerve to go back into the world - hoping that no one will remember her as the freak from the evening news, but suspecting they will. If Libby's torment has been visible for the entire world, Jack's is incredibly private. He suffers from prosopagnosia, also known as face blindness. Everyone in the world is a stranger to Jack: he cannot even recognize his own family members. But embarrassed by his condition, and not wanting to cause further stress to his own family, he has hidden this issue all his life, covering it up by acting like a jackass, clinging to the few people who he can memorize (skinny girl with mole on her cheek = that must be his girlfriend). The symbolism is a little heavy handed, so to speak: the girl too big to miss, the boy too blind to see; the girl that no one really sees and the boy who can't see anyone at all. It's evident from the beginning that Libby and Jack are making their way towards each other, and that they will let each other down along the way. There aren't any real surprises here; the story comes from the details and emotional insight of these two kids with very specific problems and very universal ones. I sometimes wished that the book had been only about Libby; having two kids, each

of them with an incredibly rare "problem", seems a little bit like overkill. And while the book promises to give us the real story behind how Libby ended up as she did, it never really does. I felt a little bit like Libby's story was never fully told. A kid who eats herself to 600 pounds, is homebound for years, is rescued by a crane -- that is extreme stuff, and I don't feel like we ever really understood why it happened. That being said: this is a good entry in the genre of emotionally realistic teen fiction, it's well written, the characters are original and compelling, and it's worth a read

I was so eager to start reading *Holding Up the Universe*, I cleared a block of time so I could thoroughly enjoy reading Jennifer Niven's latest work in one sitting. Needless to say, my expectations were sky high! This excellent YA novel proved itself early on as the author once again introduces us to truly unique teen characters who will quickly steal your heart and keep you glued to the page. With dialogue that snaps with energy and authenticity, Niven tells the story of two teens who are learning to overcome their own broken pasts and discover a way forward. They both struggle to be truly seen and their love story is memorable and inspiring. Libby yearns to prove she is more than the "fattest teen in America" and to live a normal life, whether that means going on a date or driving a car. Jack is suffering from face blindness but feels he needs to keep it a secret from a dysfunctional family, and a group of friends who don't seem to truly understand him. Libby meets Jack and the resulting story is truly magical. The characters are complex, and for the most part, the narrative drives along at a fast pace. There are times when things bog down a bit as we learn about Jack's disease, and the tone becomes a bit too didactic. These are few and far between however, and teens will have no trouble identifying with both of these characters. *Holding Up the Universe* is another compelling offering from Niven who once again proves that she is a master storyteller with a keen eye for the teen heart.

In *Holding Up the Universe*, Jennifer Niven uses some unusual situations and personal challenges to highlight problems such as bullying, finding and accepting your own identity, and seeing others for who they really are rather than whom they appear to be. She creates vivid personalities and relatable characters in this very enjoyable novel. Having gained an enormous amount of weight following her mother's sudden death, Libby Strout is the fat girl whose house had to be cut in order to remove her from it. Determination and counseling helped Libby lose a significant amount of weight and to see herself as a valuable, interesting individual rather than someone to be pitied or scorned. Jack Masselin is handsome, popular, and talented when it comes to creating and constructing mechanical things. Jack, however, cannot recognize faces; he

remembers details about an individual in order to identify that person. A cruel high school prank results in the two being required to enter group counseling. As they begin to learn about one another, Libby and Jack start to see the strengths and positive qualities each has rather than focusing on their differences and an unlikely friendship develops. The novel progresses as one would expect to a very satisfying conclusion. Jennifer Niven writes with sensitivity and understanding about the issues Libby faces as a fat girl and of Jack's inability to remember faces. Readers will begin to see these two characters as real people, likeable in many ways and having problems similar to other teens. The understanding and the compassion expressed by both characters, as well as by some of the girls with whom Libby had been friends, will impress readers. These characteristics provide good life lessons for young readers to model in their own lives. Holding Up the Universe is not difficult to read. There are numerous uses of the c-word throughout the novel; this is not an unusual speech term for many of those in the target group "ages 14 years and older. There is some discussion about sex, but it is not graphic or gratuitous; neither is it something that many teen readers will be encountering for the first time. The overall message of accepting yourself and others, and of tolerance is far stronger than the negatives of this novel.

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