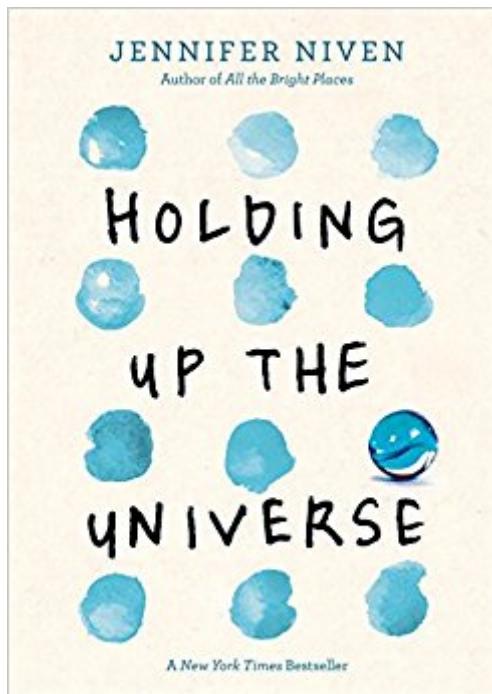


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# Holding Up The Universe



## Synopsis

A *New York Times* Bestseller 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 is 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. “Niven is adept at creating characters. . . . [Libby’s] courage and body-positivity make for a joyful reading experience.” —The New York Times “Holding Up the Universe . . . taps into the universal need to be understood. To be wanted. And that’s what makes it such a remarkable read.” —TeenVogue.com, “Why New Book *Holding Up the Universe* Is the Next *The Fault in Our Stars*” “Want a love story that will give you all the feels? . . . You’ll seriously melt!” —Seventeen Magazine

## Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Knopf Books for Young Readers (October 4, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385755929

ISBN-13: 978-0385755924

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.3 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 144 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #22,284 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Depression & Mental Illness #43 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Self Esteem & Reliance #165 in Books > Teens > Romance > Contemporary

## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up •Libby Strout is used to being alone. After her mother's unexpected death, she had eaten her grief away to the point of morbid obesity. Her trials and challenges with this issue turned her into a social media spectacle and forced her into seclusion. Now she is entering high school after years of homeschooling and a medical surgery that helped her go from 600 to 300 pounds. Jack Masselin is the resident bad boy and part of the "in" crowd, but his behavior is all a facade to cover up a big secret. Jack has prosopagnosia, a neurological condition that causes facial blindness. He uses identifiers such as hairstyles and voice recognition and has mastered the art of keeping people at bay so as not to betray his disability. Libby's and Jack's worlds eventually collide after a bullying incident and poor judgment, which places them both in after-school detention. As their friendship grows, they learn what truth and honesty are all about. Libby's unique presence and drive to be herself permeate this poignant story. Jack, who is biracial, transcends the popular pretty boy trope. Both are complex, nuanced protagonists. Written in short chapters of alternating perspectives, this is a thoughtful exploration of identity and self-acceptance, with commentary on overcoming adversities that will hit close to home. The work also examines anxiety, mixed-race marriages, and LGBTQ issues. VERDICT Niven's approach to hard-hitting subjects will speak to the intellectual teen crowd, including fans of Niven's previous work, Emery Lord's *The Start of Me and You*, and Nicola Yoon's *Everything, Everything*. •Sabrina Carnesi, Crittenden Middle School, Newport News, VA

• "[Niven] creates two indelible characters and a heart-stopping romance."

• Publishers Weekly • starred review • "Written in short chapters of alternating perspectives, this is a thoughtful exploration of identity and self-acceptance, with commentary on

overcoming adversities that will hit close to home." *School Library Journal* starred review | "This is a worthy addition to any young adult collection; the story is engaging and difficult to put down." *VOYA* starred review "Niven's honest writing shares a story of friendship, confidence, strength, and identity and it's not one to be missed." *Buzzfeed.com* "Libby and Jack are two characters who will reach out of the page and climb into your heart! [A] beautiful love story." *Justine Magazine* "A novel about love and how important it is to be seen."

*Popsugar.com* "Moving. . . . The true heart of the tale lies in personal growth and learning to love yourself." *Bookish.com* "I've never fallen in love with characters as fast as I fell for Libby and Jack. . . . *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** Praise for *All the Bright Places*: "[A] heartbreakingly love story about two funny, fragile, and wildly damaged high school kids." *• Entertainment Weekly* "A do-not-miss for fans of *Eleanor & Park* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, and basically anyone who can breathe." *• Justine Magazine* "At the heart is a big one of *All the Bright Places* lies a charming love story about this unlikely and endearing pair of broken teenagers." *• The New York Times Book Review*

3.5 stars Here's the thing...I liked the book. It was totally fine and somewhat intriguing. It was fast paced and I found myself rooting for the characters, but it just lacked....oomf....punch....pizazz. It seems totally unfair to an author to compare their second book to their first, especially of their first was such a mega-hit, but *All the Bright Places* was such a shot to the gut....I kept waiting and waiting and waiting for that to happen....and it just never did. Libby is fierce and you root for her, for sure. When she punches Jack in the cafeteria, I uttered a heck yeah! She's been through some deep crap with her mom's death and her unwanted celebrity status, but she's tough and wants what

she wants...but I felt like I was on a date and the author couldn't quite close the deal. I never felt the sexual tension. I never really bonded much with Jack at all. His story is meaningful, but it was messy and I kept hoping for his chapters to go quickly to get back to Libby. The book was fine. My students will probably like it more than me. But that is all.

I picked this book up at ALA without knowing anything about it and have since purchased a finished copy. It was on my shelf among all my other TBRs and I wasn't rushing to it until I heard the premise behind it and some backlash Niven was receiving. I was drawn to it because I'm plus size, like Libby, and have been in interracial relationships. Let me tell you something THIS BOOK IS AMAZING. Along the way I heard from a friend that someone had accused the author of creating characters who hated themselves. However, that was not my interpretation at all. Especially when it comes to Libby, America's formerly fattest teen. I found her attitude and acceptance of her body-past and present-to be very inspirational. I would go as far as to say that she loved herself. THIS IS WHAT PLUS SIZE TEENS NEED TO READ. Despite being targeted by classmates, Libby didn't let that or her weight hold her back from anything, including trying out for the dance team. A new all-time favorite passage comes from this book where Libby questions some of society's issues with people being overweight. She says, "And this whole 'pretty for a fat girl' thing. I mean, what is that? Why can't I just be pretty period? I wouldn't say, 'Oh, Bailey Bishop, she's pretty for a Bible thumper.' I mean, you're just Bailey. And you're pretty. Her counterpart, Jack, was also a well written and multi-faceted character that the reader can't help but come to love. This was the highlight of Niven's writing for me because it's clear that she extensively researched prosopagnosia and brought to life some of the struggles that people with this disorder are faced with daily. Some of these situations would literally make you stress out just reading about them. I didn't feel like his attraction to Libby was something that happened only after he "got over" her weight. He honestly seemed to think she was beautiful, weight and all. Perhaps some would say that his focus was on her personality, but I would counter that in the end, compatible personalities are the most important aspect of a successful relationship. Overall, this book was well-written and comes with many important lessons. I didn't even touch on the depth or all of the issues. All I can say is that I HIGHLY recommend this book.

\*Posted on Page Turners on 10/21/16\*Libby and Jack. Two more unlikely friends or for that matter, foes. This was a difficult book to read, and I imagine it was difficult to write. Libby is a girl who is famous in her small town for one thing -- her weight. She literally had to be cut out of her own house because of a medical emergency. Jack has prosopagnosia (face blindness), which is an inability to recognize faces. They have so much in common and yet, the don't. Libby's world was her house, Dad, fat camps and trying to cope with her mother's death. Jack's world was dealing with his father's cancer, his father's affair (with Jack's chem teacher) and fitting in with his friends. And then there is his constant struggle to associate features, so he can recognize his friends. In the midst of their inner and outer struggles, Libby re-enrolls in her high school, hoping that she isn't recognized by her former classmates. Those scenes of awkwardness and worry were written so well. Jennifer captured the inner voice of a teen girl determined to fit in and go through unrecognized and unscathed. But in a cruel twist, Jack's friends decide to play a stupid challenge. And I do mean stupid. It literally brings the two characters together and the plot becomes intertwined in their lives. Sure, there are some very predictable things that happen, but I still enjoyed them. I haven't read Jennifer's All the Bright Places, but it is on my TBR. I know fans of her writing will enjoy Holding Up the Universe, but so will people who enjoyed books that deal with characters changing their own internal dialogues and learning to be their individual selves. It's a quick read that may take you a sitting or two to finish. I loved how Jennifer brought the loose ends of the plot around into a sweeter ending than I initially expected.

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