

Absolute Brightness

James Lecesne

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Phoebe knows her already-despondent life will take a turn for even worse when her mother announces that her previously-unknown cousin, Leonard, is coming to live with them for some time. The situation is worse than she anticipated; Leonard turns out to be an eccentric 14-year-old boy who always strives to “be himself” even when “being himself” results in him being heckled and made fun of. Phoebe is among those who scorn the boy, finding his fascination in making over people and platform sandals ridiculous. Despite all the hate and dislike for Leonard beginning from the moment he stepped into the house, Phoebe finds herself missing her unique cousin’s company from the moment he goes mysteriously missing. With determination and passion that surprises even herself, Phoebe relentlessly pursues the search for Leonard and unexpectedly discovers truths about people that she never imagined before.

Absolute Brightness is a young adult, fiction novel aimed for readers in eighth grade and above. Some of the in-depth discussions contained within the novel are perhaps inappropriate for some younger readers, but at the same time, they are the ones that should be taught so readers will learn the rights and wrongs of some of the prejudices of society. Homicide and gay/lesbian bullying are heavy topics still strongly avoided in high school classrooms, but they are also topics that should be taught so the unforgivable consequences can be avoided.

Aside from the intensity included, Lecesne’s work is flawless. Each tiny detail matches up to a widespread response, implying deep thought and attention to the writing and plotline. The characters are complex and dynamic, constantly changing and showing development as the events proceed. Last but not least, the messages that Lecesne promotes through his writing are thoughtful and heart wrenching. By the end of this story, no reader will be left untouched, and hopefully everyone will continue to share this book with friends, spreading the message of *Absolute Brightness* into others’ lives.