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Every Soul A Star

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Synopsis

And as streams of light fan out behind the darkened sun like the wings of a butterfly, I realize that I never saw real beauty until now. At Moon Shadow, an isolated campground, thousands have gathered to catch a glimpse of a rare and extraordinary total eclipse of the sun. Three lives are about to be changed forever:Ally:Ally likes the simple things in life-labyrinths, star-gazing, and comet-hunting. Her home, the moon shadow campground, is a part of who she is. She refuses to imagine it any other way.Bree:Popular, gorgeous (everybody says so), a future homecoming queen for sure. Bree wears her beauty like a suit of armor. But what is she trying to hide?Jack:Overweight and awkward, jack is used to spending a lot of time alone. But when opportunity knocks, he finds himself in situations he never would have imagined. Told from three distinct voices and perspectives, Wendy Mass weaves an intricate and compelling story about strangers coming together, unlikely friendships, and finding one's place in the universe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I often feel sorry for people who don't read good books;they are missing a chance to lead an extra life. ~ Scott Corbett ~When I think about why my favorite books are my favorites, Scott Corbett's sentiments ring true. So many of them involve real-life places I've never been or fantasy worlds that I long to visit. And some introduce me to worlds that I haven't known well but suddenly find myself wanting to explore. Every Soul a Star by Wendy Mass is one of those books.The book is set at the Moon Shadow Campground in the days surrounding a total solar eclipse, and three narrators tell the story of how their paths converge there, just as the moon's shadow crosses the sun. There's Ally, a

self-confident, home-schooled kid who has grown up at the Moon Shadow, spending her time searching for alien signals and arranging rocks in the campground labyrinth. There's Bree, firmly entrenched in the life of an urban middle school social butterfly until her parents drop the bomb that she's moving to the middle of nowhere so they can work on a research project. And there's Jack, who flunked science class and is sentenced to a summer project at the Moon Shadow with his teacher. Often, when I read a novel with multiple narrators I end up liking one better than the others and wishing the whole book were written in that voice, but that wasn't the case here; every voice was distinct and every character so well-developed that I loved them as individuals and felt like I cared about each of their stories.As a middle school teacher, I always get extra excited about titles that connect to the curriculum and still maintain the rich characters, plot twists, humor, and tension that keep kids reading on their own. Every Soul a Star is loaded with astronomy, presented in a way that's accessible and compelling. It made me want to spend more time looking up at the night sky, and I found myself googling the time and location of the next total solar eclipse because this book convinced me this is something I need to see. Every Soul a Star is a perfect choice for middle school teams connecting English and Science classes, but it's also a terrific character-driven journey to the stars that kids will enjoy on their own.

Natural phenomenon lend themselves to children's literature. Picture books, for example, are filled with fireflies, rainbows, and shooting stars. Then the child readers get a little older and the phenomena get more complex. The death of the atom in "Smiles to Go" or the frozen lake of melted radioactive sand in "The Green Glass Sea" (okay, so maybe that one's not so natural). And I'm sure, I am sure, that a novel has been written with an eclipse at its climax. Odds are that such a book would be a fantasy novel. I've never heard of one, but it makes perfect sense for people to be racing against an eclipse so as to close the portal on another dimension, etc. etc. etc. Boring! You know what's exciting? Realistic eclipse fiction like "Every Soul a Star". Once again author Wendy Mass takes a crack at science and the idea of questioning a world that you may have taken for granted until now. Entirely engaging and oddly thrilling, this is one contemporary tween novel that's just begging for the right booktalk.The narrative is split between three kids as different as different can be. Two of them, however, have the exact same problem and that has to do with Moon Shadow Campground. For most of her natural born life Ally has lived on the campground far away from the rest of society, just the way she likes it. Now she's found out that her parents have sold the place to someone else and soon she'll have to move. That someone is Bree's family and as much as Ally doesn't want to leave, so too does Bree not want to stay. She's the queen bee of popularity at her

school and the notion of spending a couple years surrounded by just rocks and natural beauty is horrifying, to say the least. In the midst of this problem arrives Jack, a self-conscious artistic type who has come for the total eclipse of the sun along with thousands of other tourists. Topping it all off is an event that changes how they see themselves when all the lights go out. Backmatter consists of an Author's Note and websites and books for further reading about the night sky.I was curious to see that though four kids are hanging out in this book, only three were allowed a voice. Poor Ryan. He's a character that has been friends with Ally for years, but is suddenly far more interested in a girl as fashion conscious as Bree. One gets the vague sense that had he proved to be a more interesting person, maybe he could have earned himself a narrative. As it stands, he's just your normal everyday teenaged doofus. A nice guy, sure, but no one you'd feel the need to enter the head of. Ally talks to stars as if they were her friends, so that makes her interesting right there. Jack hasn't so much as a whisper of self-respect at the start, and that's a starting point. But it's Bree that turns out to be the surprise. I know that some girls are completely obsessed byÂ Gossip GirlÂ andÂ CliqueÂ and those other books with their amusingly vapid heroines. Well if you ever see one of these readers, try convincing them that Bree is the same kind of creature. Her goal in life is to be discovered and to become a model, so to watch an otherwise missing brain slowly morph into a decent human being over the course of 322 pages . . . now that's a natural phenomena for you!Mass does two important things with this novel. First off, she creates two entirely convincing opposite perspectives. Bree and Ally are both sympathetic, but for vastly different reasons. And as much as you'd like to continue to dislike Bree for most the book, she's a person who is easy to understand. I'm not entirely convinced that her conversion at the end of the book is anything but a pretty blatant example of deus ex machina (or, in this case, deus ex telescope) but I'm willing to let it go. The second difficult thing Mass does is to (I hate this phrase but I can't think of a better one) make science interesting. Because she really does. The part of the human brain that contains a capacity for a natural sense of wonder would have to be dead if the person finishing this book wasn't filled with a wholehearted desire to see a total eclipse of the sun. I've never wanted to see one before but after reading the description in this book I'd hop the next train if you told me one was in the general vicinity.I always enjoy a kid's book that works against my natural expectations of what's going to happen next. I mean, look at this equation: Popular girl meets unpopular girl at campground. There are only a couple of different ways you can go with a storyline like that, so Mass gets points for taking the road less traveled. For one thing, the kids in this book get along. I sort of expected this to be a novel where people fought, bickered, and came to learn about themselves through conflict. But this is a little different. The kids have essentially been tossed out onto their own

by the adults in their lives, or have left those adults voluntarily for the first time. Adrift they end up clinging to people in similar situations. And Mass toys with her canny readers, TOYS I say! You simply cannot have a boy reading the Ray Bradbury story "All Summer in a Day" (it's never named but you know that's what it is) in the first act without implying that something similar is going to happen to him in the third. I won't give anything away, but it's nerve wracking to say the last.Ally is one of the few homeschooled heroines I've found in middle grade fiction lately. That's neat. It's nice to have a detail like that interwoven with a tale about the death of the sun and that equally awesome event, our entrance into teenagerhood. And I really do think that you could sell this book equally well to the kid who loves books about science and realism as to the kid who'll only touch titles that contain fashion forward females. I could be wrong, but I think it's worth trying. Give it a look yourself. It's a pretty neat juggling act.

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