

# **I'll Give You the Sun Study Guide**

**I'll Give You the Sun by Jandy Nelson**

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## Plot Summary

“I’ll Give You the Sun” is a young adult coming-of-age novel by Jandy Nelson, which follows the lives of non-identical twins Noah and Jude Sweetwine at the ages of 13, 14, and 16. Noah and Jude live on the California coast in the town of Lost Cove with their parents, Benjamin, a conservative science professor, and Dianna, a liberal art professor. The twins grow up in a stable home environment where they are instructed in both reason and emotion, knowledge and art. Both Noah and Jude are intelligent, and well-adept in art. Their mother insists they both apply to a private high school, the California School of the Arts. Noah and Jude get along very well together, and do everything together, until they are 13.

When they turn 13, differences between them become apparent. Noah positions himself as the better artist of the siblings (and as his mother’s favorite), the more rational of the siblings, and is secretly gay. To prepare for acceptance into CSA, Noah spends his summer sketching nudes through the school’s windows, where he meets an English model named Oscar. Jude, herself far more emotional and feeling, falls in with a popular crowd of girls who are more interested in makeup and skimpy clothing than anything else. Things are further complicated by the appearance of a new kid, Brian, whom Noah quickly develops a crush on, though they keep their feelings for each other quiet. Brian and Noah both pretend to be straight, and later have a falling out when Noah cannot accept Brian’s charade.

The sky comes crashing down for both Noah and Jude when they learn their mother is having an affair, and she intends to leave their father. When they are 14, their mother prepares to serve Benjamin with divorce papers, only to lose control of her car after a rainstorm, and plummet to her death off a cliff. Both twins reel from the loss. Noah lies and tells his father and sister that Dianna was actually on the way to make things right with Benjamin when she died. Jude, long feeling invisible compared to Noah, only mails her application to CSA when her father requests she mail both hers, and her brother’s.

When they are 16, Noah is attending the local public high school while Jude attends CSA. She cannot get her sculptures right, and so is sent out to mentor with famed sculptor Guillermo Garcia. Guillermo himself is reeling from heartache. He also mentors to 19-year-old Oscar, whom is heartbroken years after the death of his own mother. Oscar and Jude take an instant liking to one another, and Jude later learns that Guillermo is the one who was having an affair with her mother, something for which she forgives him.

Meanwhile, Noah has been making dangerous dives from the rocky coastal cliffs near Lost Cove, believing that his mother’s ghost guides him down into the ocean to safety. While attempting one such jump while drunk, it is Oscar who saves Noah. Oscar and Jude soon after become an item. As the novel ends, both twins confess the truth to each other – about their mother and CSA – and reconnect. Noah, Jude, and their father decide to sell their house and live on a houseboat. Noah comes out as gay, and begins officially dating Brian – something acknowledged and accepted by Benjamin.

NOTE: Due to the structure of this novel (irregular, elongated chapters), this study guide divides the novel into sections by page numbers. Quotes listed in the “Quotes” section of the guide refer to both section number and page number as a result. This study guide specifically refers to the Dial Books/Penguin Group 2014 Hardcover Edition of “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson.



## Section 1: Pages 1 – 82

### Summary

Noah - Local tenth-grade bullies Zephyr and Fry corner 13-year-old Noah, who is gay and loves art. Zephyr tells Fry not to rip up Noah's drawings of nude men, because Noah's twin sister, Jude, says they're good. They decide not to beat up Noah, and go surfing instead. Noah thinks it is all because Zephyr has feelings for Jude. Jude and Noah live in Lost Cove, on the coast of California.

Noah and Jude's parents, Benjamin and Dianna, are opposites: Benjamin is a science professor who is very rational, and Dianna is an art professor who is very emotional and intuitive. She believes she has communed with her dead mother-in-law, Grandma Sweetwine, who believes Noah and Jude should attend a fine arts high school, California School of the Arts. Benjamin is unconvinced. While Dianna convinces Benjamin about art school, the new parrot next door can be heard to say "Where the hell is Ralph?" Jude doesn't want to attend the school; Noah does. They cuddle together, which Noah calls "The Smush".

At the museum café, Noah sees a boy he thinks is cute. Dianna explains that Jude will be the one to receive Grandma Sweetwine's bible, a leather-bound book full of her sayings, ideas, advice, and superstitions. Dianna heavily compliments Noah's art, practically ignoring Jude's.

Jude – Jude is now 16, and does her best to live by Grandma Sweetwine's bible – which advises, for example, keeping an onion in a pocket to avoid illness, which Jude does. She reflects the Sweetwine bible says that rain in December means death – and Dianna was killed two years before when her car went off a cliff after rains in December. Jude now wears her mother's old watch.

Jude does not believe she belongs at the art school, for her art isn't very good, and is routinely criticized. She is also known as being unlucky, and has been nicknamed "CJ" for "Calamity Jane". Only two girls named Fish and Felicity Stiles defend Jude's work, which is described by others as "broken apart". The ceramics and sculpture teacher, Sandy, wants to know why Jude's work seems to have come undone since her acceptance to CSA, and asks if there isn't anything she needs to say. She tells him that she needs to make something out of stone. For this, Sandy will set Jude up with a master tutor, Guillermo Garcia, outside of school who knew Dianna.

Jude communes with her dead grandmother, but has not yet been able to contact her mother. Jude heads to church to pray and reflect on life in general, on how she will get Garcia to mentor her, but runs into a photographer a few years older than she is with an English accent who takes her picture, and leaves. She does her best not to notice boys, ever since an incident with Zephyr right after Dianna's death, which she does not fully



reveal. She then heads to Guillermo's place, and is surprised to find the English guy there, who gently sends her away.

Jude goes to the beach, informed by Heather, a close friend of Noah's, that Noah will be diving into the ocean at Devil's Drop. Jude has had to save Noah's life several times after such jumps. Noah successfully manages the jump, and Jude wishes she could turn back time.

Noah – Noah is now 13-and-a-half. He believes Jude hates him, and secretly photographs her sand sculptures. Noah looks around through binoculars from his roof, when he sees a new boy watching him through a telescope. The boy gives Noah a black stone. Noah then heads to a CSA portrait drawing class, where he draws from outside the window because he isn't registered for the class, where nudes model, including a guy with an English accent that stuns Noah. The guy is impressed with Noah's work, but is later fired for being under the influence of alcohol.

Noah later meets up with the telescope boy, who likes to collect rocks. Noah develops a crush on him quickly. Jude asks Noah if she can have his most recent sketch of the English guy, and is thankful she doesn't notice his sketch of the new kid, whom she refers to as weird.

Noah reflects on how his father has long tried to get him to be tougher and more independent, which leads to Noah bonding with his mother while Jude bonds with their father.

## Analysis

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"I'll Give You the Sun" is a young adult coming-of-age novel by Jandy Nelson, which follows the lives of non-identical twins Noah and Jude Sweetwine at the ages of 13, 14, and 16. When the novel begins, Noah and Jude Sweetwine seem to have a conventional upbringing in terms of a stable family that is diverse in its aspects (and immediately, the theme of family becomes essential to the novel, both in terms of family in general, and in the brother-sister bond between Noah and Jude).

Their father, Benjamin, is conservative, and very rational, while their mother, Dianna, is liberal, and very emotional and intuitive. Both love their children deeply, and this shows clearly in how well-rounded both Jude and Noah are: they are intellectual and artistic, as well as rational and emotional.

Both Noah and Jude also appear to get along quite well together throughout their lives up through the age of 13. The only thing that isn't identical about them is their physical



appearance and makeup. But as they move into their 13th year, many things change for them.

Here, the theme of coming of age will become instrumental to the novel. As they grow older, Noah and Jude also grow apart. (This provides a place for them to grow from.) They have different interests and different friends, and their experiences also differ greatly. This leads to a rupturing of their sense of family. Noah becomes his mother's favorite, which the reader can see causes Jude to end up feeling badly about herself.

The reader should note that Jude also can't seem to get her act together in creating art. All of her pieces end up broken physically – which is manifestly symbolic of Jude herself being broken emotionally. The reader is able to easily determine that a large part of this has to do with the untimely death of Dianna.

As the novel gets underway, the reader also sees that secrets will become important, thematically, to the novel. Jude, in her section of the novel, explains that something sexual happened to her with Zephyr in a beach cave, though she directly tells the reader that she will not reveal the extent of this until much later. She is keeping a secret from the reader. Noah, likewise, has come to the realization that he is gay – something which he tells no one, but something which Jude obviously is beginning to suspect, and which Zephyr and Fry believe.

Secrets are presented as a very bad thing in the novel. Secrets are not things that should be kept, and only lead to hurt and pain for those keeping the secret, and for those from whom the secret is being kept. That the twins are keeping secrets causes the reader to wonder what other secrets are being kept, and this serves as an ill-omen for the rest of the novel.

The reader should also pay attention to two other important themes that are readily apparent early in the novel. Art is central to the plot, as both Noah and Jude are artistically-inclined, and love to create things. Indeed, art is central to their lives – to Noah's, especially, who is constantly drawing and sketching. He does it for love of both the art itself, and the accolades it earns him from his mother. For Jude, art is a way to speak – but to say what is left unclear as of yet to the reader.

The other theme that becomes readily apparent early in the novel is that of loss. The reader is here confronted with two major losses: a loss in the relationship between brother and sister (which has yet to fully be explained) and the loss of their mother (which has also yet to fully be explained).

## Discussion Question 1

What is the relationship like between Noah and Jude when the novel begins, and when Noah and Jude are later 16? Is their bond still the same, or has it changed?



## Discussion Question 2

What is the upbringing Noah and Jude experience, like? How do they view this upbringing? How does it affect them?

## Discussion Question 3

What secrets are Noah and Jude keeping this early in the novel? Is this to their benefit or their detriment? Why?

## Vocabulary

cretin, sociopaths, gargantuan, metaphorically, inimitable, resounding, bequeathed, lilted, inundate, vehemence, exasperated





## Section 2: Pages 82 – 157

### Summary

Noah (continued) – Noah is worried because the Ouija board he and Jude use says that she, and not he, will get into CSA. That night, he goes out into the woods with the new kid, who introduces himself as Brian –an east-coast boarding school sophomore, who skipped a grade. Brian collects meteorites. They come across Fry and another large bully, Big Foot, who call them homos. Brian then chucks meteorites at Fry and Big Foot, who apologize and then run away. Noah and Brian begin spending a lot of time together, which Jude notices. Jude explains that Brian is good at baseball, and is known as “The Ax”, and she wants to meet him. She thinks Brian is cute.

Brian and Noah decide they have to find Ralph, because the parrot, Prophet, is still asking where Ralph is. While on the roof watching stars, Brian reveals his own dad left years before. They nearly have a romantic moment, but Noah leaves.

While coming out of the woods the next day, the Hornet Girls – Courtney Barrett, Clementine Cohen, Lulu Mendes, and Heather – are excited to see Brian, and are all dressed in bikinis. They invite Brian and Noah to come hang out at The Spot. Noah says he has to go, and leaves Brian with the girls, imagining he has imagined everything the night before.

Jude, meanwhile, has been wearing makeup and wearing provocative clothing, which is criticized by Dianna. Jude is jealous of Noah and Brian hanging out with the Hornets, though she struggles to remain close to Noah, herself. When Brian and Noah go to see a movie, they secretly hold hands.

At a party before Brian heads back east, Noah finds two guys secretly kissing, and wishes he could protect them. He then finds out a game will be played where people of the opposite sex are locked in a closet for seven minutes to see what happens. Noah and Heather are chosen for one closet. Noah kisses Heather passionately, imagining her to be Brian, and Heather is thrilled. Brian is angry, and heads into a closet with Jude. It is then that the English guy, drunk, appears. He tells Noah to take a class with Guillermo Garcia. Noah then heads home, angry at Jude and Brian.

Jude – Jude knows the only way to get through to her mom is to make a stone sculpture with Guillermo’s guidance. She likewise cannot stop thinking about the English guy. Noah comes into Jude’s room. Noah has begun running cross-country at Roosevelt High, and his coming into Jude’s room is unusual. He explains that their dad will be away for a week, and they are going to throw a party. Jude knows Noah is not the same person he was years before. Noah, too, knows Jude has changed – putting beans and seeds in his wallet to protect him.



Jude knows that Noah is gay, and has been posting on LostConnections.com for Brian. Jude knows her dad has been suffering greatly, going on long walks and appearing to be blank all the time. Separated for a month, Jude reveals that Dianna had gone to ask Benjamin to come home when she'd had the accident. Jude also knows that her father and brother think they are okay, but they are not.

The night of the party, Jude sneaks over to Guillermo's to watch him work all night. He works in clay and stone, just as Jude wants to work in stone. She believes he, too, has ghosts. When he moves to destroy one of his sculptures the next morning, Jude shouts at him not to do it – and then he notices her in the window.

## Analysis

It is obvious to the reader by now that both Noah and Brian have growing feelings for one another, but neither one of them acts on their feelings, keeping them a relative secret from each other. Here, again, secrets are presented as a detrimental and painful thing – both on the part of the keeper, and the part of from whom the secret is being kept. Indeed, Brian goes so far to keep his homosexuality as secret that he pretends to be straight – an act which infuriates Noah.

More about Noah and Jude's past also becomes apparent to the reader as the novel unfolds. The reader should pay attention to two distinctive pieces of information given by Jude in this part of the novel. First, Jude knows that Noah is gay, has had a falling out with Brian, and has been seeking Brian out on LostConnections. Second, Jude reveals the second rupture in their otherwise seemingly stable family: their mother had been on the way to bring their father back home when she had an accident and died. Now the reader wonders two things – what happened between Noah and Brian, and what happened between Noah and Jude's parents?

Noah, though he is angry at Brian for keeping secrets, does much the same thing when he kisses Heather. Even though he pretends Heather is Brian, he allows Heather to believe that he is interested in her, and that the kiss was genuinely given. This is detrimental not only to Brian's sense of self, but demonstrates, again, how keeping secrets harms others as well.

It is obvious to the reader at this point that both Noah and Jude are adept at keeping secrets, and this is something they must learn and grow from (the theme of coming of age reemerges here). A large part of keeping secrets for Noah has to do with fear (specifically of Fry), but there is another reason the reader suspects has to do with Brian, though this is not yet revealed. Jude herself is not totally forthcoming with all of the things that have happened to her and involved her – including the reason why she and her brother have grown apart at the age of 16.

Jude also clearly has something she is attempting to work through. The reader should pay attention to the fact that Jude wishes to mentor with a famed sculptor who not only works in clay, but in stone. Stone is unbreakable, unlike Jude's pieces, which all end up



breaking – and she needs help to be able to handle a new medium. This is something which will nearly be fully explained in the coming section of the novel. The reader should also pay careful attention to the fact that Jude recognizes in Guillermo a fellow broken heart from the loss of something – and the presence of ghosts.

Art, thematically, also comes to matter heavily in this section of the novel. Surprisingly, Noah is not attending CSA, but the local public high school. All along, the reader has believed that Noah would be an easy addition to CSA, but this is not the case. By high school, it also appears as if art – once something Noah did nonstop – has ceased to matter at all for him, the why of which presents another question that must be answered.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Noah kiss Heather? Why does he refuse to tell her the truth about himself, and the kiss? Should he be faulted for this? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do Benjamin and Noah believe they are okay following the death of Dianna? How does Jude know they are not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Brian seem so angry when Noah and Heather emerge from the closet, especially given Brian's own charade of pretending to be straight? Do you believe Brian has a right to be angry at Noah? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

telepathically, exhilarated, intergalactic, supernatural, prodigy, beseeching, perplexed, impenetrable, brusquely



## Section 3: Page 157 - 235

### Summary

Jude (continued) – Guillermo catches up with Jude as she tries to run away. He is enraged she has not left him alone. Jude explains she needs to be mentored by Guillermo, since his work is almost magical. She believes he will be able to help her do what she must do to make things right. She explains that she, like Guillermo, is not alright. He then invites her in for coffee. Inside, she sees beautiful sculptures of angels, which Guillermo says do not sing to him. Jude whispers a prayer into an angel's ear.

Jude and Guillermo get along well, and she feels comfortable around him. Jude gets the idea that Guillermo is lovesick. Guillermo reluctantly consents to working with Jude. Her wish to the stone angel has been granted. Outside, she runs into the English boy again. He is interested to learn that Guillermo has agreed to mentor her. He tosses her an orange – an orange Jude's grandmother explains will make a girl's love for the giving boy, grow. She decides to give it back to him. She can already feel herself falling for him, though she doesn't want to, especially not on the day of the accident.

Jude returns to Guillermo's the next day. There, she learns the English guy is 19, and his his name is Oscar. Oscar, in college, explains that Guillermo saved his life years ago. Jude realizes they are a non-blood-related father and son. Jude tells Guillermo that her mother breaks all of her artwork, and that she died two years before. Guillermo believes it is not Jude's mother that is the problem, but that Jude herself isn't present. He says he is looking for the girl who watched him through the window, and that is the girl he wants to see in the sculpture.

Jude explains she wants to do a sculpture of her mother, so she can capture her beauty. They begin by doing nude studies of Oscar, whom Guillermo describes as having a face made by God when God was drunk. He tells Jude not to think, but to draw with her heart. Afterward, she asks Oscar if they have ever met before, because he seems familiar. Oscar says they have not, but thinks they have been meant to meet, and then requests Jude be a nude model for him. She isn't thrilled about the idea. She is also jealous of the fact that Oscar appears to be dating a girl named Sophia. It hurts Jude deeply.

Jude goes through Guillermo's things while he is out. She finds his office a mess, and finds a love letter he has written but never mailed. She also comes across hundreds of art books, including some written by her mother. She takes the letter and her mother's biography of Michelangelo. She does not know why she steals them.

At home, Noah is interested to learn that Jude will be doing a sculpture of their mother. When she begins to go into detail about the plan – for their mother's hair and clothing to be billowing in the breeze – Noah fakes receiving a phone call and leaves. Jude knows things will never be the same between her and Noah again.



Jude talks to her grandmother's ghost, who tells Jude not to write off Oscar just yet. Jude then makes another wish in an angel's ear. Oscar walks in on this conversation. He is amused rather than weirded out when Jude explains she was talking to her grandmother. Oscar explains he and Sophia are not a couple, and that he has never been in a relationship for more than nine days. He also reveals he communes with his mother in his dreams. He keeps his mother's favorite seashell with him always, and considers it his lucky charm.

Oscar explains he hasn't been the best person in the world. For example, he used to take his mom's pain medication – and one night, when she was sick, she fell out of bed, but Oscar couldn't help her because he was passed out from the meds. Oscar heads out for work. Jude, meanwhile, begins sculpting, and remembers how Noah nearly committed suicide by diving from the cliffs, and would have had Jude not saved him.

She begins to wonder whether she truly communicates with the dead, or she just makes it up in her mind. She goes through Oscar's things, and learns his last name is Ralph. This makes her believe that God has had a hand in things due to the parrot searching for Ralph. She also learns from Oscar's notes and photos that his mother had predicted he would meet a girl, glowing like an angel, in church. But then she hears Oscar return with another girl, who asks about Jude – and Oscar dismisses Jude as no one. She leaves quickly, only to be found by Noah.

## Analysis

Loss and art become important themes through this section of the novel. Jude explains to Guillermo that she is seeking to say something through her art to her mother, for a past mistake she has made. Creating an unbreakable sculpture of stone will allow her to atone for what she has done. The reader can easily see that she is looking to both be redeemed and freed by art, though she does not explicitly say as much.

Jude's pursuit of sculpture also indicates the degree to which art has become central to her life. She will be training with a master of the field, seeking to put her past into the work itself. She recognizes that Guillermo is a kindred spirit, putting his torment of loss into his creations. Like Jude, his own creations often end up destroyed, though by his own hand.

This past mistake referenced by Jude is not yet revealed, but serves as yet another secret she is keeping. Guillermo's own unrequited love is a secret that he, too, keeps – and is one that quite clearly torments him to the point where he destroys the very things that he creates. Jude discovers her mother's books among Guillermo's art library. To the casual observer, a writer's books on another's shelves are hardly something to reconsider – but that Jude pays so much attention to them being in Guillermo's studio is something to note, serving as a harbinger for later events.

As Jude begins to work with Guillermo, and begins to regularly interact with Oscar, her own transformation in coming of age begins. She is learning to better understand and



work as an artist, all the while using it as a way to confront and make the past right – as well as overcoming her avoidance of boys since the night of the Zephyr incident (though this is still not revealed).

At the same time, Noah does not appear to be growing any. If anything, he appears to be digressing, placing little value or emphasis on the importance of his own life by making ridiculous dives from dangerous stretches of coastal cliff-lines. Whereas Jude is beginning to finding herself, it is apparent that Noah is trying to lose himself. To risk his life in such a fashion demonstrates that the secrets he is keeping are threatening to rip him apart.

Furthermore, the reader also notes how the theme of family informs this section of the novel. Without Dianna, the Sweetwine family seems to have fractured beyond repair. Noah and Jude are still very distant, with contact between them even at home rare, and only when Noah does something dangerous – like his dives – does Jude actively become involved in his life. This lends further credence to the idea that Jude knows her brother is not okay.

The reader should also make note of an important occurrence at the end of this section of the novel. Jude runs into Noah as she leaves Guillermo's studio. Why he is there is not fully explained, but it is now apparent to the reader that it is more than coincidental that Dianna's books are in Guillermo's art library. The next section of the novel will only deepen this mystery.

## **Discussion Question 1**

In what ways does Jude begin to come of age in this section of the novel? How does this affect her character as a person?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Does Noah begin to come of age in this section of the novel? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Jude say she wishes to work with Guillermo, especially in stone? Why is Guillermo's reaction? Why do you believe this is so?

## **Vocabulary**

conundrum, botulism, snide, subterfuge, sentient, unrequited, ethereal, rapport, oblique, duplicity, extravaganzas, suffice, intrepid, mores, iota, effervescing



## Section 4: Pages 239 – 319

### Summary

Noah – Noah is approaching the age of 14. The day after Brian leaves, he sees instant messages between Jude and Brian, which appear to be romantic. Noah is enraged. He has been doing everything he can to avoid Heather as well. He goes to 225 Day Street, where Guillermo's studio is located. He sees a floating woman enter a nearby church, and then looks in through the studio windows to see massive sculptures that all appear to be looking at him. He watches Guillermo, like a father, teaching a room full of students. It makes Noah realize how much better he needs to be to get into CSA.

As Noah walks home, his mom picks him up on the way. She appears to be slightly out of it, and pulls into someone else's driveway rather than their own. Noah notices strange behavior with her lately, including smoking cigarettes, always keeping her cellphone with her, and staring at the ceiling when she should be writing. Noah goes out to eat dinner with his dad, during which time they trade facts about animals and parasites. Driving home, he tells Noah he had a dream about Dianna walking through the house, seeing everything fall off shelves, and him trying to put everything back together. Noah pretends he is dating Heather to make his father happy. He draws his father a portrait.

Noah later learns that his parents need space and are separating. His father brings only one thing with him to his hotel – a suitcase, inside which is the portrait Noah has drawn him. Noah is hurt, because he has wished for so long that his father would leave. Jude later tells Noah that she did not steal Brian away from him, and nothing happened in the closet. The boy she has been talking to online is Michael Ravens, Zephyr. Jude consults her grandmother's bible to find a way to bring their father back home.

Brian returns for winter break. In the woods, he and Noah kiss. Brian tells Noah that no one can ever know, because the people at the boarding school are not kind. As they are about to have sex in Noah's bedroom, Noah's mother walks in on them. Brian quickly leaves, and Dianna comes to talk to Noah. She tells him what he is feeling is normal, and it takes courage to be himself. He tells her not to tell his father. He later hears his mom on the phone saying she's going to meet at The Wooden Bird to discuss something important with Noah. Noah is panicked she is going to tell Benjamin.

Noah stakes out The Wooden Bird, a massive sculpture surrounded by picnic benches. There, his mom meets Guillermo, with whom she is having an affair. They kiss passionately. Noah runs, and comes across Brian and Courtney, who have been kissing. Noah is furious, shouts that Brian is gay, and keeps running. At home, Dianna explains what happened with Noah made her want to follow her own advice – and divorce Benjamin to be true to her own heart. She says she is in love with another man – and Noah walks out on her.





Jude – Jude looks at a photograph of her parents, taken after they were married. He was eleven years older than her, and had asked her to marry him after knowing her just three days. It makes her think of what may or may not exist between her and Oscar. Jude goes online to find out where Brian Connelly is now. She learns he came out as gay to the entire school during a winning streak in baseball. She sends Noah's note at LostConnections to Brian via an anonymous e-mail address. She later hears Guillermo telling Brian he is a coward for not letting anyone in since his mother died.

Jude goes to work with Guillermo. He tells her that what is bad for the heart is good for art, ironically. Guillermo says he truly believes in second chances, that even God had to rework the world after the flood, using Noah and the Ark. She thinks about the past, about how angry she was with her brother for attempting suicide – and so she only mailed her application to CSA, and not Noah's. This is why she feels her mother destroys everything she creates. She puts her emotion into her rock sculpting. She feels as if she has been invisible all her life, especially to her mother.

Jude then sends an e-mail to CSA saying they need to look at her brother's portfolio. She texts her brother saying they need to talk. She then returns to the sculpture she is working on – of herself and Noah, and cuts it in half, so they are saved. She feels free. She then gets a text message from Heather saying Noah is not himself, and wants to jump Dead Man's near The Spot. A party is underway, and Noah is not at The Spot, but up at Dead Man's, says Zephyr. It makes Jude remember losing her virginity to Zephyr, and then Fry wanting to pass Jude around to all the other guys, which Jade refused.

Zephyr pushes with Jude through the crowd and goes along with Jude to help Noah. She tells him never to take advantage of another girl the way he did to her. He says she thought she wanted it, but she tells him never again. They find Noah, drunk, near the cliff's edge. But it is Oscar, appearing out of nowhere, who stops Noah from jumping.

## Analysis

With the close of the last section of the novel, the reader will remember that Jude ran into Noah as she was leaving Guillermo's studio. At the age of 14, it is Noah leaving the studio and running into his mother which catches the reader's attention. It now serves to be the case that it is beyond coincidental for Noah to have been at the studio – and for Noah's mother and her books to be at the studio as well.

As Noah later learns, he is not the only one keeping secrets. His parents have separated because his mother is having an affair with Guillermo, and intends to leave his father for Guillermo. This enrages Noah to no end. He feels especially sickened when his mother tells him that her decision to leave Benjamin came about based on the fact that she told Noah he should not hide from who he truly is as a gay male.

To Noah, and to Jude, this is betrayal of the worst kind. Jude understand quite correctly that Dianna's infidelity is not merely a betrayal of Benjamin, but a betrayal of the family itself, and everything the family has meant to each of its members. The reader now





realizes why things have been so tense. Family tragedies pull families together – unless what has caused the tragedy is what pushes them apart.

Noah, despite his mother's compliments on accepting his homosexuality, continues to pretend he is straight for more than just fear of the reaction of other kids like Zephyr and Fry. Noah has been pretending to be straight because Brian has explained he wants to keep things secret. Here, Brian and Noah, in their determination to remain secret, end up hurting each other and themselves, and hurting others, like Courtney and Heather as well.

While Noah spirals downward, Jude is able to continue to overcome her past through her art. She is able to confront the things she has done, and her remaining secrets are here revealed to the reader. Her first sexual experience with Zephyr was something she truly didn't want, and Fry's sickening reaction only makes things worse for Jude.

Jude's other secret is also equally heartbreaking. Though her motive is not yet entirely clear, Jude never mailed Noah's CSA application in – meaning that only Jude would be accepted to the school. It is now clear why Noah attends public school, and Jude attends art school. The reader can imagine that Jude's decision to refuse to send in Noah's CSA application has to do with her having felt invisible against her brother when it came to both art and their mother. There are clearly still unresolved family issues, here.

But Jude's secrets are not the only ones revealed in this section of the novel. Using the internet, Jude learns that Brian has come out as gay – and has been accepted by his team and the community in the end. Jude recognizes that Brian should be made aware that Noah is looking for him, and hopes that Brian's courage of coming out will also help encourage Noah to come out as gay as well.

The reader also recognizes that Noah has refused to come out as gay not merely because he worries about the reactions of others, but because he has longed to be closer to his father, especially in light of the death of Dianna. Noah worries that his sexual orientation will not be accepted by his father, or even if it is, might somehow ruin the growing father-son relationship that has been kindled between them. The reader will recognize this as both an understandable concern, and one that is unfair to some degree, because Noah doesn't even seem to want to give his father a chance.

Noah's downward spiral finally comes to a halt when Oscar prevents him from diving off a dangerous stretch of cliff at Dead Man's. The reader should note the symbolic nature of the act of stopping Noah from jumping – meaning that he will now not hit rock bottom, or reach a place from which he cannot return.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Noah is justified in not wanting to come out to his father as gay? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

What mistake does Jude feel she needs to overcome, or seek forgiveness for? How is she intending to do this?

## Discussion Question 3

Noah and Jude believe that Dianna has betrayed more than just their father by having an affair, but the entire family as a whole. Do you believe this is an accurate assessment? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

static, delirium, bewildered, retaliation, existential, dilemma, sacrilegious, granules, frenetically



## Section 5: Pages 320-371

### Summary

Jude (continued) - Noah tells Oscar he isn't himself anymore. Oscar is stunned to learn that Noah and Jude are siblings. He apologizes for the day before, but Jude ignores the apology and thanks Oscar for saving Noah. Noah explains he always jumps so that his mother will catch him. Oscar tells Noah he is sure that Dianna would rather her son live his life instead of risk it. Noah says his jumping is the only time their mother forgives him, and that everything is about to get worse.

Oscar explains he was about to have his first drink in 234 days – but that Jude, on her way up to Dead Man's, knocked the drink out of his hand. He then gives Jude his mother's seashell, on a ribbon, to wear as a necklace. They then hold hands.

Jude stays up late, finishing up plans for Dianna's sculpture. Oscar comes to her window, and she puts on a dress she has made herself. He kisses her. They then have sex. Oscar tells Jude he can't keep her out the way he keeps everyone else out. Oscar then sees a photo of Jude's family - then panics and leaves.

Noah – Noah, age 14, tells his mother he hates her as she leaves the house, only to have her mouth from the car that she loves him. A short time later, the police call the house, saying that Dianna's car has spun out of control on Highway 1. The officer then calls Benjamin, who relates to Noah what happened. He lies to his father, telling him that Dianna was on her way to find him to fix the family. He then goes to tell the same thing to Guillermo.

Jude – Oscar looks at Jude's sketches of her mother, and realizes who she is. Guillermo says he cannot help Jude, and tells her to leave. Noah and Oscar then appear. Noah blames Dianna's death on Guillermo, which angers Oscar. Jude realizes Guillermo was having an affair with her mother. Noah confesses he lied about Dianna being on the way to fix things, but was actually seeking a divorce. Noah explains that he did this to protect Jude and their father, and this is why he put so much distance between himself and Jude. He blames himself for the death, for telling her he hated her before she drove away with tears in her eyes.

Jude and Noah go for a long walk. She confesses having never mailed Noah's CSA application. Rather than angry, Noah is happy, for he knows now he isn't a horrible artist. Noah then brings Jude to an abandoned construction site, where he has spray-painted pictures of everything in his life. He says he realizes that art is supposed to be about magic, not about getting into a school. He and Jude then reconnect, as if no time or distance has been between them.

They come across their dad, out for a walk. Noah tells him the truth about everything. It makes his wife's death much easier for him to deal with, now. The family decides to



move out of their house, and onto a houseboat called “The Mystery” in the harbor. Jude is also thrilled to be forgiven by her father for the CSA application debacle. Benjamin then meets Oscar, and Noah begins laughing, for Ralph has been found. Oscar later explains to Jude that her mother used to go on and on about her at the studio, and when they went to church. He explains that she told him he could never meet Jude until he was three years sober and she was at least twenty-five. He goes on to explain that he will wait for her, because she is not legally old enough to be with him, yet. But Jude refuses to let him stay away.

Noah and Jude later go to Guillermo’s studio. Guillermo reveals he was the one who sent in Noah’s photos of Jude’s sand sculptures to CSA, believing that that is what Dianna would have wanted. Jude decides to keep working with Guillermo. She then returns her mother’s Michelangelo biography to Guillermo. Benjamin, upon learning his son is gay, and has gotten together with Brian after finding his e-mail address online, says it makes more sense to him that Noah is with Brian and not Heather. Jude now knows the world has been remade.

## Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, Noah and Jude finally confess to one another – and to their father – all the secrets they have been keeping. This mass confession demonstrates their coming of age – of moving to a place of courage in both moral character and self-respect. They have both endured tremendously heartbreaking experiences in life – including the adultery and death of their mother – and have ultimately come out stronger because of everything they have been faced with (including issues of their own making).

Jude confesses to Noah that she never mailed his CSA application in, which Noah is actually thrilled about. He now knows he has true talent, and realizes that his perception of art had been skewed and twisted. He had come to consider art a contest, as something decided by a school selection process, rather than allowing it to be an emotional, magical, and transformative experience – the way that Jude has let it be for herself.

Noah also has two confessions he makes in the giving up of secrets. First, he confesses to both Jude and his father that Dianna was never truly on the way to make up with Benjamin when she died – but to divorce him once and for all. He explains he was haunted by the fact that he last told his mother he hated her before she died – and his jumps from the cliff are a way for him to be reminded that his mother is still watching out for him.

Noah’s second confession is to his father, and is about Noah’s being gay. Noah’s conservative father does not shun, berate, or condemn Noah. Far from it, Benjamin explains that, more or less, a mystery has been solved, and Noah being with Brian makes more sense in retrospect than it does with Noah being with Heather.



Jude also takes charge of her own destiny, drawing on the lesson of her brother, and her parents. Her father, eleven years older than her mother, and having asked Dianna to marry him after knowing her for only three days, encourages Jude to follow her heart no matter what obstacles may be in the way. While legally due to California law, Jude at 16 cannot be with Oscar at 19, she is going to let nothing stop her from being with Oscar.

With all of these secrets confessed, the tragedy that has befallen the Sweetwine family is lifted – and the family is able to once again grow closer, deciding to sell their house and buy a houseboat on which to live in the Lost Cove harbor. Noah and Jude grow much closer to each other – and to their father, whom they come to value unlike they ever have before. Benjamin himself is now more at peace that the truth of his wife's death is fully known. The sense of loss that he, Noah, and Jude have all felt is now gone.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How does Noah handle the truth behind his CSA application? Why is this?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What secret has Noah been keeping from Jude and their father about Dianna's death? How do Benjamin and Jude react to this? Why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Even though it is technically illegal for Jude and Oscar to be together, Jude refuses to let Oscar get away. Why?

## **Vocabulary**

imbecile, inoculated, eluding, obliterate, belated, emphasizing, presumptuous



# Characters

## Jude

Jude Sweetwine is one of the two main characters of the novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson. The non-identical twin sister of Noah, Jude appears in the novel at the ages of 13, 14, and 16. Jude is also the daughter of Benjamin and Dianna Sweetwine. Jude is a sweet and kind girl who is also very pretty, and has taken largely after her mother in terms of her intuition, sensitivity, and emotional nature. Jude grows up close with her brother, but at the age of 13, they drift apart. Jude becomes interested in things like makeup and skimpy clothing as her body develops, and she grows closer to her friends. Jude has long felt invisible against her brother, especially when it comes to her art.

Jude and Noah are equally horrified when they learn that their mother is having an affair, which they rail against and take as a betrayal not only of their father, but of the entire family. Her death, likewise, further traumatizes the siblings. Both react in different ways. Jude, still feeling invisible, refuses to submit her brother’s application to California School of the Arts, meaning only she gets in. In sculpture, she can never quite get any of her work to come out unbroken, which symbolically serves as a physical manifestation of her guilt over what she has done to her brother. The broken art is taken by Jude to be retribution from her mother. As such, she decides to work in stone, mentoring under Guillermo Garcia, to make a sculpture of her mother to atone for what she has done wrong.

Jude befriends Oscar Ralph, who has become like a surrogate son to Guillermo. Jude quickly falls for Oscar, but both of them are truly afraid to commit to each other. Jude is afraid to trust boys after her horrible first sexual experience with Zephyr, coming to reflect on the fact that she was too young to have sex that first time, and Zephyr – two years older – should have known better. Nevertheless, Jude ultimately ends up dating Oscar, and comes clean to her brother about his CSA application. As a result, Jude and Noah again become close once more as the novel ends.

## Noah

Noah Sweetwine is one of the two main characters of the novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson. The non-identical twin brother of Jude, Noah appears in the novel at the ages of 13, 14, and 16. Noah is also the son of Benjamin and Dianna Sweetwine. Noah tends to be as rational as he can, analyzing and overthinking everything down to the last detail, and taking largely after his father in this respect. Noah grows up close with his sister, but at the age of 13, they drift apart. Noah largely withdraws into himself as he discovers he is gay, and draws closer to his mother as he has very few friends. Noah has long struggled to be superior to his sister, especially when it comes to art. Noah later falls for a new boy in town named Brian, but Brian insists they hide their



feelings for each other, which Noah agrees to do out of concern for Brian, and out of fear about how others will react. Ultimately, the two part ways, for Noah cannot handle Brian pretending to be straight.

Jude and Noah are equally horrified when they learn that their mother is having an affair, which they rail against and take as a betrayal not only of their father, but of the entire family. Her death, likewise, further traumatizes the siblings. Both react in different ways. Noah's mother, having discovered Noah was gay, praises Noah for being true to himself, and decides to take her own advice by seeking to finalize the divorce with Benjamin. This causes Noah to tell her he hates her before she is killed. Noah is sickened by this, and lies to his father and sister, telling them that Dianna was on her way to make things right, not to make them worse. Noah begins making dangerous jumps from the cliffs, believing that his mother's spirit prevents any harm from befalling him – and thus brings him close to her again. He is also saddened by the fact that he was never accepted into the California School of the Arts.

By the end of the novel, Noah decides to come clean to Jude and Benjamin about Dianna – which helps them both to move on. It also helps Noah to move on. Noah likewise comes out as gay, and to his surprise and happiness, is not rejected or condemned by his father for being gay. Faced with the truth behind his CSA application, Noah is very forgiving, coming to realize that art isn't something determined by a school, but by the individual: to Noah, art should be a thing of magic and transformation, not graded or judged.

## Oscar

Oscar Ralph is a 19-year-old English-American who is both mentee and surrogate son of Guillermo Garcia. An orphan, Oscar had traumatic teenage years as his mother was dying, messing up in numerous ways –such as passing out on pain pills and not hearing her call for help. He spends much of his life after her death drinking, and scraping to get by. He hires himself out as a nude model, where he first encounters Noah. Oscar is later taken in by Guillermo, who sets Oscar on the right path. Oscar cleans himself up, attends college, and gets into photography as well as other art forms. He first meets Jude in a church, having previously known her mother. Afraid to let anyone else in after the death of his mother, Oscar fights his feelings for Jude, but ultimately falls in love with her, and begins a relationship with her as the novel ends.

## Benjamin

Benjamin Sweetwine is the father of Jude and Noah Sweetwine, and is the husband of Dianna Sweetwine. Benjamin is conservative, a science professor, and deeply rational with all that he does. He encourages his son to be tougher, but loves both of his children deeply and equally. Benjamin helps to inculcate his children with a respect of, and love for, learning. Benjamin, despite his apparent nature, is also something of a romantic, having asked Dianna, eleven years younger than he is, to marry him after only knowing



her for three days. Benjamin is later stunned and heartbroken by her affair and subsequent death. When he learns the truth behind her death – that Dianna was not on her way to make up with him – he finds it easier to move on. He is likewise unfazed by his son's coming out as gay, and decides with his children that they will all move into a houseboat.

## Dianna

Dianna Sweetwine is the mother of Jude and Noah Sweetwine, and is the wife of Benjamin Sweetwine. Dianna is liberal, an art professor, and strongly relies on emotion, intuitions, signs, and feeling. She comes to favor Noah for his love of art, and later comes to have an affair with Guillermo Garcia, which leads to her children becoming incredibly angry with her, and her intending to leave her husband in divorce. Dianna, upon discovering her son is gay, knows she must also be true to herself, which is why she intends to finalize the divorce. She is killed while driving to see Benjamin about the divorce when her car spins out of control and plummets into the ocean.

## Brian

Brian Connelly is a high school sophomore, and the new kid on the block. He is interested in astronomy, collecting meteorites, is excellent at baseball, and is secretly gay. He is worried about how others will react if he comes out as gay, and so he pretends to be straight. He and Noah begin a tense, secret relationship that ultimately ends when Noah has had enough of pretending. Brian comes out as gay a few years later, and is ultimately accepted by his friends and baseball team. Brian renews his relationship with Noah at the end of the novel.

## Guillermo

Guillermo Garcia is a world-famous sculptor and artist who becomes the mentor of Jude, and the father-figure of Oscar. Guillermo is a brilliant artist who has an affair with Dianna. He is heartbroken when she dies, and is later stunned to discover that Jude is her daughter. Guillermo is ultimately forgiven for his affair by Jude, and she stays on to continue working with him at the end of the novel.

## Grandma Sweetwine

Grandma Sweetwine is the mother of Benjamin, mother-in-law of Dianna, and grandmother of Noah and Jude. Grandma appears in the novel seemingly as an imagined ghost, keeping Jude company as Jude lives her daily life and struggles with things like boys. Grandma has left behind for Jude what she called her bible, a collection of advice, wisdom, warnings, encouragements, and other similar writings meant to guide the reader through life.





## Heather

Heather is a girl of Noah's age who is romantically interested in Noah, and has what she believes to be the beginning of a relationship with him. She does not know he is gay at first, and does not know that Noah is pretending to be straight. She later learns this, and becomes the only person Noah has entrusted with this secret.

## Courtney

Courtney is a pretty, popular girl, who believes she is in a relationship with Brian, not knowing that Brian is gay until Noah tells her so. Courtney is stunned by the revelation, for she truly liked Brian. With his cover blown, Brian has no choice but to return to the east before coming out there.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Sweetwine bible

The Sweetwine bible is a leather-bound handwritten volume of a collection of advice, wisdom, warnings, encouragements, and other similar writings meant to guide the reader through life, originally compiled and composed by Grandma Sweetwine. The bible explains things like gifts of oranges from boys means girls will grow to love them, and keeping an onion in a pocket will ward off illness. Jude is given the bible, and lives her life by its writings, consulting it frequently throughout the novel, and adding her own thoughts down as well.

## Broken sculptures

Each sculpture created from clay by Jude while at CSA ends up broken in some way, shape, or form. She believes this is because her mother is angry at her for having never mailed Noah's CSA application. Symbolically, the broken sculptures are a physical manifestation of how Jude feels inside – broken and in turmoil. As such, she decides to want to work with a medium that is far stronger - stone.

## Spray paintings

Spray paintings are created by Noah in an abandoned construction site using spray paint. The paintings depict people and events from Noah's life, including his parents and his mother's death. He shows the paintings to Jude after Jude comes clean about the CSA application, and explains that he had forgotten that art was supposed to be a personal, magical, transformative experience – and not a reason to get into a school.

## Stone sculpture

A stone sculpture of Dianna is planned by Jude. Jude hopes the ode in stone to her mother will be a source of forgiveness from her mother, and will earn her mother's forgiveness as well. When the novel ends, Jude has finalized her plans for the sculpture, and is prepared to begin work on it.

## Twins sculpture

A sculpture of twins is created by Jude while working at Guillermo's art studio. This sculpture of the twins represents Jude and Noah being seen primarily as twins, rather than separate individuals. Jude knows that to survive, they must recognize the differences in each other, and she uses a circular saw to cut the sculpture in half, freeing the twins, and metaphorically freeing herself in the process.



## Orange

An orange is given to Jude by Oscar, and is later given back to Oscar by Jude. This is in accord with Jude's grandmother's wisdom that a gift of an orange to a girl from a boy will make the girl's love for the boy increase. Jude is afraid to let anyone in, and so does not want the orange from Jude.

## CSA applications

Applications to the California School of the Arts are written and filled out by Noah and Jude. Jude is entrusted with the task of mailing the applications off, but out of jealousy of her brother, and out of anger over favoritism shown toward Noah by their mother which makes Jude feel invisible, she only mails in her application. She feels horrible about it, and carries around the guilt with her for two years, until she comes clean to Noah.

## Sketchbook

A sketchbook full of nude figure drawings and other subjects is carried around by Noah early in the novel consistently. The nude figures include drawings of Oscar and Brian. Fry intends to destroy the notebook at the beginning of the novel, but Zephyr stops Fry on behalf of Jude.

## Michelangelo biography

A Michelangelo biography is one of the many books written by Dianna as an art professor. This biography is among Dianna's works kept by Guillermo in his art library. Jude steals the book, and later returns it without ever knowing exactly why. The reader surmises that this is an unconscious attempt by Jude to collect the scattered pieces her mother has left behind her; and is also an attempt to steal away a piece of her mother from Guillermo the way that Guillermo stole away Dianna from the family.

## Clay

Clay is the primary medium that Jude, Guillermo, and other artists use for sculpture. Clay is a soft and malleable medium, and can be worked and reworked until it is fired or dries out. All of Jude's original sculptures are made of clay, and end up breaking for some reason or another. Eventually, Jude decides to move beyond clay, and work in something far more firm – stone.



# Settings

## Lost Cove

Lost Cove is a Northern California coastal town that appears to be at least medium-sized, for it boasts a museum, a harbor and lies along Highway 1. Lost Cove is a quiet, beautiful place, surrounded by cliffs and beaches on one side, and hills and forests on the other. Lost Cove is the hometown of Jude and Noah, and is where Benjamin and Dianna have decided to raise their family. It is to Lost Cove that Brian moves during the novel, and it is in Lost Cove that Guillermo has his studio. Lost Cove is also geographically situated relatively close to the California School of the Arts, making walks to the school practicable.

## The Spot

The Spot is an area of the coastline near Lost Cove where teenagers and new adults get together to party, drink, and do drugs. Noah, when he is younger, avoids the place at all costs, only later coming to relish the place for alcohol and making dangerous jumps into the water. When Jude is younger, she loves the Spot (though not for the partying), and has her first sexual experience in a cave near The Spot, which she later realizes she was too young to have.

## Guillermo's studio

Guillermo's studio is located at 225 Day Street in Lost Cove. It is where Guillermo lives, works, and teaches classes of students in the art of painting and sculpture. It is also where Jude travels on a daily basis to work with Guillermo as a mentor. It is also where Oscar occasionally spends the night in the loft. Guillermo's studio is where Jude later learns that Guillermo was having an affair with Dianna, and where Jude later forgives Guillermo for his role in things.

## The Wooden Bird

The Wooden Bird is a tall statue of a bird on the edge of the cliffs near the town of Lost Cove. No one knows who carved the bird, or why, but it is popular with locals and tourists who picnic in the area. It is at the Wooden Bird that Noah see his mother meet Guillermo, and learns that his mother is having an affair.

## CSA

The California School of the Arts, or CSA, is a private, arts-oriented high school with a curriculum geared primarily toward the arts. It is located close to Lost Cove, California,



and is attended by students from all over the world, though most are from America. It is a school that Noah desperately wants to get into in order to advance his art, and is a school that Jude originally couldn't care less about applying for. In the end, it is Jude who truly finds her calling through art at the school, while Noah's non-attendance renews his passion for art – a non-attendance made possible by Jude's refusal to mail in his application.



# Themes and Motifs

## Coming of Age

Coming of age is an important theme in the novel "I'll Give You the Sun" by Jandy Nelson. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences, events, or mistakes. In the novel, Jude and Noah both come of age in different ways, but in the end, they are stronger, better people for it.

When the novel begins, Noah and Jude are inseparable as they have been through childhood. But as they grow into their thirteenth year, they begin to grow apart as they pursue separate interests and go through different experiences. Noah discovers he is gay, and begins something of a clandestine relationship with Brian, which Brian requests - and Noah agrees - be kept secret. Noah is worried how others will react if he comes out as gay, especially when Fry and Zephyr already accuse him of being gay, and torment him for it. As such, Noah pretends to be straight to please everyone around him.

Jude herself feels invisible compared to the love that Dianna bestows on Noah, especially for his art, and so she takes to hanging out with the popular girls, wearing makeup and dressing in skimpy clothing. She has a horrible first sexual experience with Zephyr, later admitting to herself she was too young to have sex for the first time. She has little self-confidence, and is unsure about her artistic merit.

Noah and Jude are both horrified to discover their mother has had an affair, and are later even more deeply traumatized to learn their mother has been accidentally killed. For Noah, his grief is compounded by the fact that his last words to his mother were of hate, and Jude believes her mother is ruining her artwork because Jude refused to mail in Noah's CSA application.

Jude, however, commits to finding forgiveness from her mother through art, and her work with Guillermo helps to free her and liberate her from the past. She is able to put her feelings into her work, and is able to say something about her life as a result. She grows in confidence and courage, and comes to discover that she is indeed a good artist, not destined to ruin everything she creates. She also gains the courage to tell Noah the truth about his CSA application, which he takes happily. Jude also manages to recover romantically as she begins a relationship with Oscar.

Jude's honesty and courage make her a stronger, better person, and she inspires Noah to come clean about many things as well. Noah gains courage and admits that his mother was not on her way to make things better with Benjamin when she died, but was headed out to finalize the divorce. This has been much of what has been keeping Noah away from Jude the past few years. Noah also comes out as gay to his father, who



accepts his son for everything that he is. Noah is able to begin a relationship with Brian as a result, and is a stronger and more courageous person for it.

The honesty that Jude and Noah have with one another also allows them to grow closer again. They come to trust one another again, and are able to reconnect as brother and sister. They recognize now that they are not just twins, but two distinct, unique people with separate lives that intertwine.

## Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways.

When the novel begins, the Sweetwine family appears to be secure, stable, warm, and loving. Jude and Noah grow up in an environment with a conservative, rational father, and a liberal, intuitive mother. As a result, they are well-cultured in both academics and the arts. They likewise grow up knowing how deeply their parents love them, and this encourages them to always do their best in life. This is especially true when it comes to art.

However, when it comes to art, the first signs of family discord appear. Dianna comes to prize Noah and his artwork over Jude, who feels invisible as a result. She grows closer to her father, but also branches away from her family, preferring to spend time with friends, instead. Noah revels in his mother’s affection, and longs for his father’s affection – but his father only reminds Noah to toughen up, not out of hatred, but out of fatherly concern.

As Noah and Jude grow into their thirteenth year, they also grow apart from one another as they are different people with different interests and experiences. Noah’s secretive homosexuality naturally forces him to keep distance between himself and his sister; and Jude’s feelings of invisibility cause resentment and distance between her and Noah.

The siblings are, ironically, united in anger and hatred toward their mother over her affair. They feel she has betrayed not only their father, but the entire family in general. Her love and loyalty have been compromised by another man, and this is unacceptable to Noah and Jude. Noah especially is vitriolic toward his mother, telling her he hates her when she heads out to finalize the divorce. In turn, she tells him she loves him, and then loses control of her car and is killed while going to meet Benjamin.

The death of Dianna causes Noah and Jude to reel. Noah lies to his father and sister, telling them that Dianna was on her way to patch the marriage up, rather than end it. Jude, resenting her mother and her brother, refuses to mail in Noah’s CSA application. These secrets cause massive guilt on the part of Jude and Noah, and compel them to keep away from each other.



Only at the end of the novel, when all secrets are confessed, does the family finally begin to heal. The tragedy that has driven apart now draws them close together, in fact making them closer than they were before. They decide as a family, for example, to leave their house in Lost Cove for a houseboat in the town's harbor. Benjamin accepts his son's homosexuality, and accepts Jude's dating Oscar. They begin spending more time together as a family, and Jude knows they now have a second chance to do even better than before.

## Art

Art is an important theme in the novel "I'll Give You the Sun" by Jandy Nelson. Nelson underscores the importance of art in the novel by making it prominent in the lives of the characters, and the town in which they live on the California coast.

Lost Cove appears to be a medium-sized town, for it has an art museum, and it is close enough to the California School of the Arts for Noah to walk there. Many of the people who live in the town are artists, are associated with CSA, or maintain art as a central part of their lives. Guillermo Garcia, for example, teaches painting and sculpture classes, living and working in Lost Cove. Dianna herself is an art professor who not only teaches the subject, but writes about it extensively.

Art is also central to the lives of Noah and Jude. When the novel begins, Noah is never without his sketchbook, always drawing portraits of people. He uses these sketches to create color renderings and paintings. His art is praised and held up high by Dianna, and Noah revels in the accolades. His dream is to get into CSA, and is later heartbroken when he learns that Jude, rather than he, is accepted. As a result, Noah essentially gives up on art, only belatedly beginning to use spray paint to create beautiful murals from events and people in his life, which he later shows to Jude.

When he learns from Jude that she never sent in his CSA application, he is happy rather than angry. He explains that he lost his way with art: Art isn't about awards, contests, or school acceptance, he explains, but is about magic, love, and transformation. He doesn't need CSA to confirm to him what he already knows, that he is a good artist, and that art is something personal, not a matter of a grade from a teacher.

Jude herself loves art, though she believes she does not compare to her brother. Her favorite thing to create is temporary sand sculptures, which are always washed away by the ocean. She feels invisible next to Noah and his artwork, and feels discarded against all of the praise Noah receives. As a result, she refuses to send in his CSA application, meaning she is accepted, and he is not.

Jude comes to believe all of her finished sculptures keep breaking because her mother's spirit is breaking them in anger over her having not sent in Noah's CSA application. Jude mentors with Guillermo Garcia to train to ultimately make a sculpture of her mother in stone, which becomes transformative for Jude. She feels as if she has





been forgiven and freed through her various sculptures under Guillermo, and is finally able to put passion and love into her work – and it shows.

## Secrets

Secrets are an important theme in the novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson. Secrets are pieces of information or knowledge kept by one person from another, or many others, and are seen as a terribly negative thing in the novel. Secrets are seen as bad things because they hurt the secret-keeper as much as the person (or people, as the case may be) from whom the secret is being kept. The novel abounds with secrets.

Among the first secrets the reader learns is that Noah is gay, and doesn’t want to tell anyone about it. He keeps his homosexuality to himself, afraid of how others might react. Brian is the same way, begging Noah not to tell anyone that he is gay, or that they are in a secret relationship. Both boys pretend to be straight, and as a result, are not true to themselves.

They hurt themselves, and each other, by pretending to be straight, letting jealousy get the best of them as they see each other pretending to be with girls. They also hurt the girls they are pretending to be with by leading them on to no end. Noah also hurts his father by keeping the secret of his homosexuality, by not even wanting to give his father a chance to be told the truth.

Dianna herself also keeps a secret from her family – of an affair with Guillermo. Only belatedly does she admit to this, and decides on divorce, which infuriates her children. Her affair, and her keeping it a secret, have undermined their family’s loyalty and unity, and is an act of betrayal toward not only her husband, but her children. As a result, Dianna deeply wounds every member of her family.

Noah, who learns his mother is driving off to finalize the divorce, tells her he hates her before she goes. When she is killed, Noah is grief-stricken and feels sick for having been so cruel to his mother before she died. He keeps this secret from Jude and their father, telling them instead that Dianna was on her way to repair the marriage and the family, not end it. As a result, Benjamin feels incomplete and lost, as if there was a chance to make things right that he never got to take.

Jude also has her share of secrets. Her refusal to send in Noah’s CSA application, and only her own, is a secret the eats away at her conscience for two years. She believes her mother is punishing her by breaking her sculptures as a result. Noah is initially hurt deeply by the fact that Jude is accepted to a school that he doesn’t even hear from.

Jude also has trust issues from having sex at too young an age with Zephyr – a secret which she keeps from everyone, and as such, is unable to be true to herself or to others. She pushes other boys away as a result, fighting at first to keep Oscar away before finally letting him in. Oscar himself believes he is too much of a screw-up to be loved, and so pushes girls away as well, for he is still reeling from the death of his



mother years before – something which he keeps secret, and which ends up hurting Jude, who believes that Oscar is only playing with her at first.

## Loss

Loss is an important theme in the novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” by Jandy Nelson. Loss involves the losing of something or someone important to an individual or group of people, and affects them in immense ways. There are not shortages of loss in the novel.

Jude and Noah experience loss early on, as their close sibling-relationship growing up fractures as they move through their teenage years. Jude explains she wishes she could turn back time to make things right. Jude and Noah, long seen as inseparable, simply grow into their own people with their own experiences, and their own choices in life – including the secrets that they keep from one another – end up driving them apart. As a result, they experience a sense of loss at no longer being close to one another like they used to, which hurts them both deeply.

Jude and Noah also experience loss for themselves, and for their father, when the family learns that Dianna has been cheating on Benjamin. Jude and Noah take this as a betrayal not only of their father, but of their entire family as well. They are hurt deeply by the loss of their formerly stable and loving family unit.

Jude, Noah, and their father are all likewise brokenhearted even further when Dianna is tragically killed while on Highway 1. Though they are angry with their mother, they are traumatized by her death – something that they never wanted or intended to happen. Their world feels much smaller without their mother in it.

Noah later feels a tremendous sense of loss when he and Brian attempt to keep their homosexuality, and their relationship with each other, a secret – but this proves disastrous. The two part on bad terms, and Noah spends the next two years devastated, and seeking to find Brian again and make things right.

Jude herself also feels a loss when she has sex with Zephyr at too young an age. She feels as if her innocence has been stolen as a result, and so she forces herself to keep away from boys for the next few years. Her sense of loss haunts her until she meets Oscar, with whom she finally relents and opens up to.

Oscar himself has been dealing with a sense of loss the past few years, since the death of his mother. Oscar found it difficult to handle his mother’s illness, and so did idiotic things, such as drinking too much and taking drugs. Oscar is devastated when his mother dies, and only lately cleans up his act. He still feels a sense of loss over his mother’s death to this day.

# Styles

## Point of View

Jandy Nelson tells her novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” in the first-person reflective omniscient narrative from the point of view of 13-year-old Noah, and 16-year-old Jude, in a back-and-forth time-hopping fashion, with Jude’s narration being in the present, and Noah’s being two to three years in the past. The reflective aspect of the narrative involves Jude looking back at the past to reveal to the reader how things came to be as they are, and how things as they are unfold in the present. Noah’s narrated sections lead up to how things are, and fill in many of the details that Jude is either reluctant to provide, or withholds for the time being from the reader. This adds a sense of mystery and curiosity to the novel, and allows the reader to know only as much as the twins are willing to reveal when they are willing to reveal things.

## Language and Meaning

Jandy Nelson tells her novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons: the first is that the novel is geared toward young adults, so the language is reflective of that level of education and comprehension. It makes the story and its characters relatable to younger readers. The second reason is to lend realism and believability to the characterizing of Noah and Jude as siblings in their young and mid-teens. The simple and straightforward language is likewise reflective of their age and level of education.

## Structure

Jandy Nelson divides her novel “I’ll Give You the Sun” into eight large, unnumbered chapters titled by the narrator of that chapter, either Jude or Noah. The chapters themselves leapfrog back and forth across three years of time, with present-day chapters being narrated by 16-year-old Jude, and past chapters being narrated by Noah between the ages of 13 and 14. The chapters from the past demonstrate what has led up to the chapters of the present, and the chapters of the present demonstrate what is currently unfolding. The alternating periods of time in the chapters add a sense of mystery and intrigue, and allow for the twins to keep secrets until the past and present collide at the end of the novel.



## Quotes

Mom has a massive sunflower for a soul so big there's hardly any room in her for organs. Jude and me have one soul between us that we share: a tree with its leaves on fire. And Dad has a plate of maggots for his.

-- Noah (Section 1, Page 11 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Here, Noah, who is as intuitive as he is intellectual, speaks about what the souls of his parents would be like at the beginning of the novel. He demonstrates that his mother has a beautiful soul and a big heart, that he shares a soul with Jude because they are so close, and that his father – traditional and rational – has a horrible soul. This is an unjust and unfair description of not only his father, as Noah will later come to find out, but of all of them.

The feet of ghosts never touch the ground.

-- Grandma Sweetwine (Section 1, Page 25 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In a passage from the Sweetwine bible, Grandma's saying that the feet of ghosts never touch the ground is important in a metaphorical way. Ghosts are part of the past, and are the past haunting the present. As such, they are not physical, and they do not themselves directly have physical impact in the world in the present (their feet do not touch the ground), but still nevertheless shape and determine the future in the hearts of people who see those ghosts/remember the past.

This is what I want: I want to grab my brother's hand and run back through time, losing years like coats falling from our shoulders. Things don't really turn out like you think.

-- Jude (Section 1, Page 55 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Jude is unhappy with how life has turned out – primarily with how she and her brother have grown apart, and how their mother has died. Jude reflects on something that all readers wish at one time or another – to go back and change the past.

This Noah also goes out with girls, keeps his hair buzzed and tidy, hangs at The Spot, watches sports with Dad. For all other 16-year-old boys: fine. For Noah, it signifies one thing: death of the spirit.

-- Jude (Section 2, Page 145 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Noah is denying his true self by the age of 16. He is pretending to be straight, has cut his hair short, and watches sports. He has more or less abandoned art. He is not the same person he was a few years ago, and Jude can easily see that her brother is in turmoil on the inside.

I need help, that kind of help, because I have this idea that I can make things right, like if I make it, maybe someone will understand something finally and that is very important to me... because she never understood me, not really, and she's very mad about



something I did...

-- Jude (Section 3, Page 160 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Here, Jude half-explains to Guillermo why she wants to work with him, and why she wants to make a sculpture out of stone. She wants to create something important as a tribute to her mother for the CSA application debacle, to be forgiven and to be freed. Guillermo accepts this vague explanation, and agrees to work with her.

We're never going to be okay. We're never going to be us again.

-- Jude (Section 3, Page 209 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Here, toward the middle of the novel, Jude worries that she and her brother will never quite be themselves again, that they will never again have a close bond the way they used to. In respects, this also applies to her father, who has been listless and severely depressed since the death of Dianna.

Mom used to say when you look at art, it's half seeing, half dreaming.

-- Jude (Section 3, Page 212 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Here, Jude relates a piece of wisdom given to her by her mother. Art is in many respects about looking at something, but it is also about dreaming about something – seeing the world in the way in which the artist sees it, or seeing an idea, vision, or belief the artist wishes to convey. Dreams are things born of love, just like art. Art is to be experienced like a dream, not just viewed. Those dreams are also like mysteries that are never fully explained. A painting may be more than just a painting, but may have a deeper truth, which may only ever be known to the painter.

I know it's my father she's betraying, but it feels like it's me too. And Jude. And every single day of our lives.

-- Noah (Section 4, Page 287 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Here, Noah reveals that he and Jude feel as though their mother has betrayed not only their father, but their entire family as well. Her affair isn't just rupturing a marriage, but an entire family, and an entire way of life. She has compromised the bond and the loyalty between them, and this is unacceptable to Noah. To Noah, it is no longer his father with the soul like a plateful of maggots, but his mother, instead.

What is bad for the heart is good for art. The terribly irony of our lives as artists.

-- Guillermo Garcia (Section 4, Page 301 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Guillermo conveys a sad piece of wisdom to Jude. He explains that tragedy, sadness, anger, hatred – all the emotions negative to the human experience – are what help to inspire incredible works of art. The art becomes a conduit to express emotion in a constructive fashion, which the world then benefits from.

It's time for second chances. It's time to remake the world.

-- Jude (Section 4, Page 309 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** By the end of the novel, Jude has been transformed. She is no longer the same girl – and her brother and father are no longer the same people, either. They have all grown better, and closer together, and the future looks bright for them.