

Firegirl

By: Tony Abbott

Publisher: Little, Brown

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Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction

Setting: School & home

SUMMARY: The day that Jessica enters his class at Catholic school, everything changes for Tom. Jessica's been badly burned in a fire and is in his class while she's receiving treatment at a local hospital. Suddenly, what he thought he knew about himself and his friends is challenged. Tom finds himself thinking about Jessica more and more while he watches his friends trying to pretend she doesn't exist. Tom must choose between befriending Jessica and his best friend Jeff. He begins to see both of them, and himself, for who they truly are.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Tony Abbott was born in Cleveland, Ohio. His parents hooked him on books at a young age. In college, he majored in English Literature because he liked reading all the books. After college, Abbott worked in bookstores and libraries.

He began writing books while reading bedtime stories to his children. He has been a professional writer for over 20 years. He also conducts writing workshops with students. Issues such as overcoming obstacles, rejection, and failure are themes of his talks and writing.

Other books written by the author:

Cracked Classics series
Danger Guys series
Don't Touch that Remote
Kringle
The Postcard
Secrets of Droon series
The Weird Zone

SIMILAR BOOKS/BOOKS WITH A SIMILAR THEME:

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse
Stargirl and *Love Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli
A Face First by P. Cummings
Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes by Chris Crutcher
Degrees of Love by Rachel Basch
Each Little Bird that Sings by Deborah Wiles
One Handed Catch by M.J. Auch

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (If question is related to a specific chapter, chapter is in parenthesis following question)

1. How does Tom change throughout the book?
2. Describe the things that Tom realizes about his friend Jeff.
3. After seeing Jessica's picture, rumors start about her. Describe a time when rumors were spread about a person you know. How did the person react?
4. Research severe burns, skin grafting, or another related medical issue from the book. Share what you learned about the topic.
5. If you could choose any car to ride in, which one would it be and why?
6. Why did Jessica say she hated her mother? (p. 86)
7. Why do you think Jessica said the picture was of her sister? (chapter 11, chapter 14)
8. How do you think the divorce of Jeff's parents affected how he behaved toward Jessica?
9. Tom is a pretty quiet kid. The only person he really talks to is his friend Jeff, who doesn't listen to him anyway. Tom's mom tells him he needs to "get out there". What do you think she means? What are some ways you "get out there"?
10. It's obvious that Tom has a crush on Courtney – every day he daydreams about saving her life. Why do you think Tom imagines he's a superhero? What do you think of his "small powers" like being about to skip really fast or having an indestructible finger? If you could choose a superpower, what would it be and why? Why do you think Tom chose "small powers"?
11. Mrs. Tracy decides to hold elections for Tom's class and allow everyone to vote. Do you like this idea? Would you run for class president? How would you campaign, and what would you say in your speech?
12. When Jessica Feeney arrives in Tom's class, all the students are speechless. Some are even disgusted. Why would they act that way? What do you think makes them afraid? How do you think you would act if you met Jessica?
13. While all the other students talk about Jessica behind her back, Tom feels awful about it. He wants to tell them to stop, but he can't. What makes it so hard for Tom to tell them to stop talking about Jessica? Why do you think he cares? Would you tell your fellow students to stop talking about someone that way? What would they say?
14. At St. Catherine's, some of the students give Jessica a hard time. Jeff doesn't want to hold her hand, and some kids say mean things about her behind her back. Why do you think Jessica still wants to go to school with other kids? Do

- you think she's a stronger person because of it? If you were Jessica, would you go to St Catherine's?
15. Tom hardly ever talks to anyone besides Jeff, not even his parents. But the few times he goes to Jessica's house, he starts to tell her things he's never told anyone else. Why is he able to open up to Jessica? Why do you think she understands him? In what ways are Tom and Jessica alike?
 16. Jeff complains to Tom about his parents' divorce because his dad doesn't seem to want to see him and his mom is too busy working. Name some of Jeff's actions that show he's angry at his parents. What are some better ways for him to deal with the divorce? Do you know of a friend whose parents are divorced? What effects has this had on how your friend deals with his or her parents? Would you be angry if you were in Jeff's place? Why or why not?
 17. Although Jessica was only in Tom's life for a few weeks, she made a big impact on his life. After she leaves, Tom feels like a completely different person. How do you think meeting Jessica changed Tom's view of life? What do you think happened to Tom? Has there been a person in your life who has changed in the same way?

LITERARY LINKS:

Reader's Theater and links to information on burns and dealing with disabilities:

<http://suzyred.com/2007firegirl.html>

Being at ease with kids with handicaps:

<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/at.ease.html>

Tony Abbott's homepage:

<http://www.tonyabbottbooks.com/>

General information on burns and treatment:

http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/emergencies/burns.html

<http://phoenix.gov/FIRE/burns.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burn>

Information on the car Cobra:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AC_Cobra

Research on how divorce affects children:

<http://www.childrenanddivorce.com>

Discussion of "hidden burns" – the emotional scarring that can be covered:

http://www.burnfoundation.org.au/Content_Common/pg-Hidden-Burns.seo

Reviews:

<http://dogsbedtimestory.blogspot.com/2007/08/firegirl-by-tony-abbott.html>

http://bookshelvesofdoom.blogspot.com/bookshelves_of_doom/2006/05/firegirl_tony_a.html

<http://www.commonensemedia.org/book-reviews/Firegirl.html>

<http://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/0316011711.asp>

Language Arts (List each and Indiana Academic Standards Grades 6-8 addressed by each):

1. Pretend you are Tom's friend Jeff. Write journal entries for the three weeks that describe Jeff's thought and attitudes about what is happening in his life, particularly as it relates to his parents divorce.
2. Create a collage on different sports cars. Write a report on why these cars are so popular. Explain why you think cars are so important in our culture.
3. Research the effects of burn injuries and children. Document how the treatment of burns has improved and create a poster that shows your class what you have learned.

Standard 2 – read and understand grade-level appropriate materials

Standard 4 – write informational pieces; identify topics and questions for research; create compositions;

Standard 5 – writing, varied word choice, etc.

Standard 6 – writing conventions

Other (List each and Indiana Academic Standards Grades 6-8 addressed by each):

Health

1. Research the effects of burn injuries and children. Document how the treatment of burns has improved and create a poster that shows your class what you have learned.

Health and Wellness: 7.4, 7.6, 7.7

Contributors: Joy Dewing, Donna Rummel, Lu Dayment, Di Pretu, Julia Nixon, and Roberta Ash