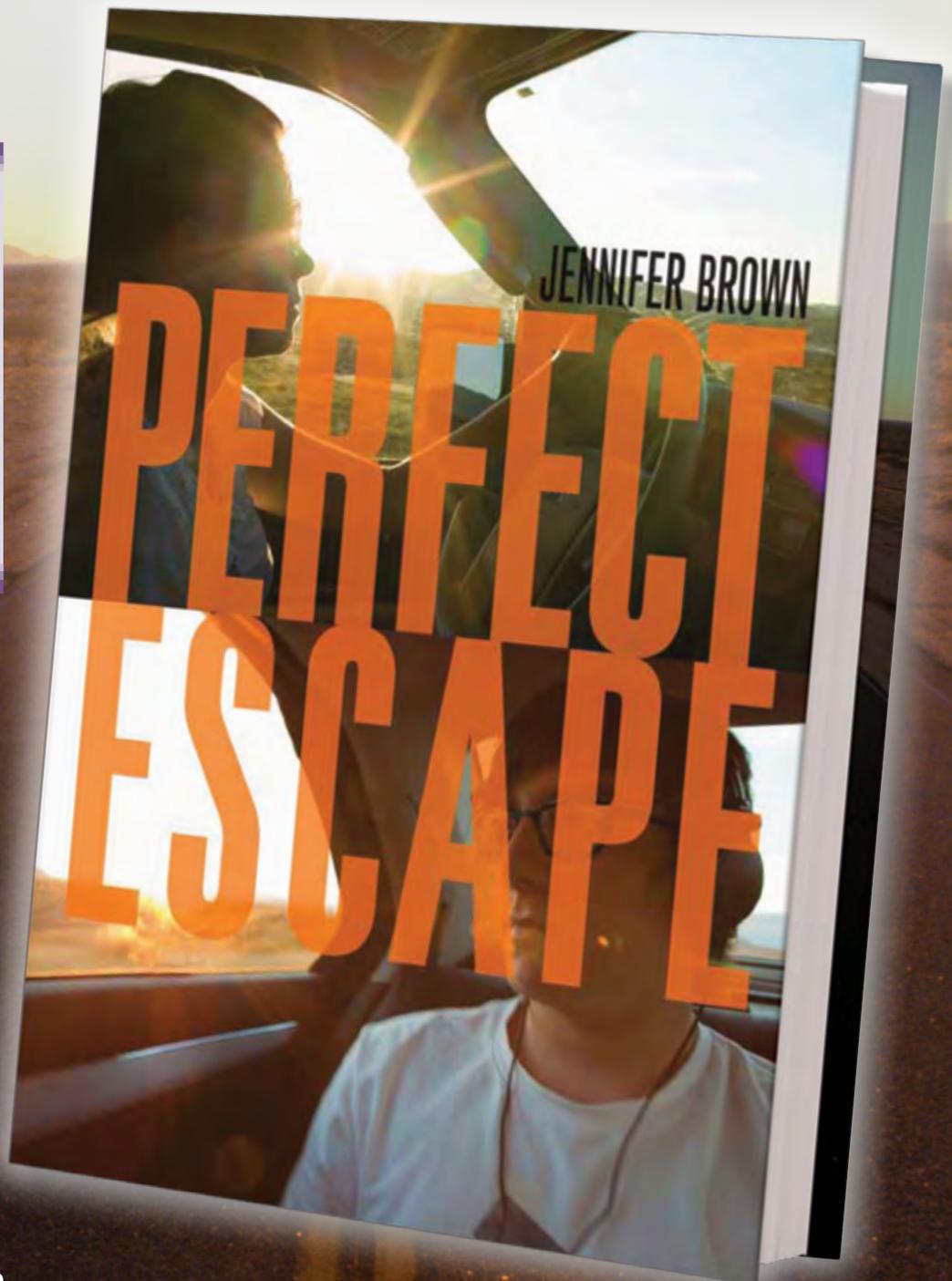


PERFECT ESCAPE

thematic connections

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Depression and Mental Illness
- ❖ Social Issues

Ages: 12 & up



by
Jennifer Brown

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the opening of *Perfect Escape*, Kendra states, “Grayson’s difficulties dominated his life. And Mom’s and Dad’s. And mine.” Do you agree with her assessment? In what ways do Grayson’s problems overshadow Kendra’s? Do you find Kendra to be equally needy? Why or why not?
 2. What role does the quarry play in Grayson’s life? In what ways is it symbolic of his bigger issues (like OCD)? How do the other members of his family cope with this obsession?
 3. Consider Kendra’s statement, “Nobody warned me he’d be coming home today.” Why does Grayson’s return cause her so much anxiety? Do you think Kendra’s parents are justified in not preparing her for his return?
 4. Describe Kendra. What makes her a dynamic character? Is she the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not?
 5. Kendra says, “I blamed Zoe’s parents for the fact that I lost my two best friends for no good reason.” Why does Kendra blame Zoe’s parents for the worsening of Grayson’s issues? Do you believe Zoe’s parents were justified in moving Zoe away? How did Zoe serve as an anchor for Grayson?
 6. *Perfect Escape* contains a number of characters who exhibit various strengths. Which character’s strength do you most (or least) relate to? Explain your choice.
 7. Explain the significance of the title, *Perfect Escape*. In your opinion, does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel? Do you believe it’s possible to truly escape from your problems? Why or why not?
 8. Kendra is profoundly affected by Grayson’s OCD; the loss of her best friend, Zoe; and the academic dishonesty charges she is facing. She finds herself struggling to confront the reality of these obstacles. Identify the catalyst(s) that enables her to overcome these challenges and learn to deal with her brother’s illness, the loss of her friend, and the consequences of her actions. In what ways do you expect her to be changed by these experiences?
 9. Throughout the novel, readers witness the complexities of various relationships. Consider which characters’ relationship seemed most similar to one of your own personal relationships. What about it reminded you of your experiences?
 10. *Perfect Escape* is told in first person; how would the story be different if a character other than Kendra were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
 11. Why do Kendra and Grayson feel drawn to Rena? What is it about her circumstances that makes them want to help her? In what ways does her presence help them in return?
 12. Considering Grayson, Kendra states, “Everyone tiptoed around my brother. Everyone wanted him to be normal, not even bothering to see that I was better than normal. I was damned perfect. It was all about him, all the damned time, and I was so sick of it I wanted to scream.” How does this imbalance of attention affect Kendra’s well-being? Why does trying to be perfect prove to be so problematic for her?
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PERFECT ESCAPE

13. In *Perfect Escape*, fear both motivates and incapacitates Kendra. Consider how she deals with her fears. Does she acknowledge them? In what ways do we witness her turning to others for assistance? Who would you turn to if you were in Kendra's shoes?
14. Grayson tells Kendra, "You don't think it killed me every time someone treated you like there was something wrong with you because of me?... And every time you did something great, I had to act happy for you, when all I could think was how much I hated you for not being sick like me. How much I wanted to be you. Just for one day." How does Grayson's statement help Kendra better understand him? Predict how their relationship will be changed after their road trip experience.
15. Do you agree or disagree with Kendra's perceptions about how her parents were taking care of Grayson? Do you think Kendra could have done any better than they could?
16. Kendra often gets upset when her friends make fun of Grayson, even though she makes fun of him, as well. Similarly, while Kendra complains that Grayson demands all of her family's attention, she craves attention, herself. How do you feel about Kendra's "double standard" when it comes to Grayson? Why do you think Kendra behaves or feels this way?
17. Using the phrase: "This is a story about...", supply five words to describe *Perfect Escape*. Explain your choices.

RESOURCE LIST

National Alliance on Mental Illness: <http://www.nami.org>

NAMI Information Helpline: 1-800-950-6264

International OCD Foundation: <http://www.ocfoundation.org/childOCD.aspx>

Anxiety Disorders Association of America: <http://www.adaa.org>

Awareness Foundation for OCD: <http://www.afocd.org>

Public Medical Health: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001926/>

National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Kids Health Organization: <http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/OCD.html>

Being the Other One: Growing Up with a Brother or Sister Who Has Special Needs,
by Kate Strohm (Shambhala, 2005)

about the book

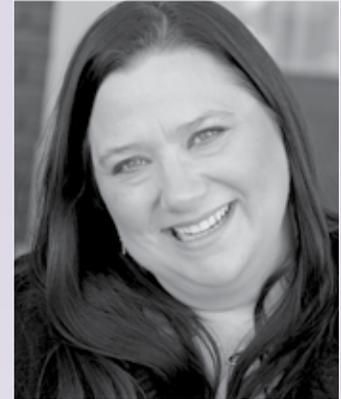


PERFECT ESCAPE
by Jennifer Brown
978-0-316-18557-8

Kendra has always felt overshadowed by her older brother Grayson, whose OCD forces him to live a life of carefully coordinated routines. The only way Kendra can stand out next to Grayson is to be perfect, and she has perfection down to an art—until a cheating scandal threatens her flawless reputation. Behind the wheel of her car, with Grayson asleep beside her, Kendra decides to drive away from it all—with enough distance, maybe she’ll be able to figure everything out. But even in the midst of the road trip’s flat tires, gas-station food stops, and detours to quirky roadside attractions, eventually Kendra must stop running and come to terms with herself, her brother, and her past.

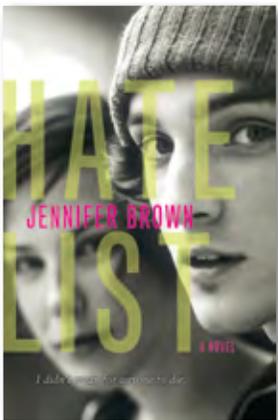
With undeniable grace and humor, acclaimed author Jennifer Brown explores OCD, the pressure for perfection, and the emotional highs and lows of a complex sibling relationship.

about the author

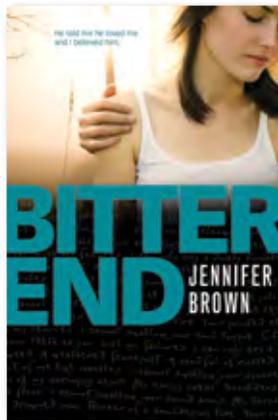


Jennifer Brown writes and lives in the Kansas City, Missouri, area with her family. She is the author of *Bitter End*, which was named an ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults title, and *Hate List*, which received three starred reviews and was selected as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a VOYA Perfect Ten, and a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year.

about by Jennifer Brown



HATE LIST
978-0-316-04144-7 HC
978-0-316-04145-4 PB



BITTER END
978-0-316-08695-0

★ **“Startling, powerful, and poignant.”**

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ **“A story that is as sensitive and honest as it is spellbinding.”**

—VOYA, starred review

★ **“Riveting debut.”**—*Publisher’s Weekly*, starred review



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Educator’s Guide prepared by Rose Brock.