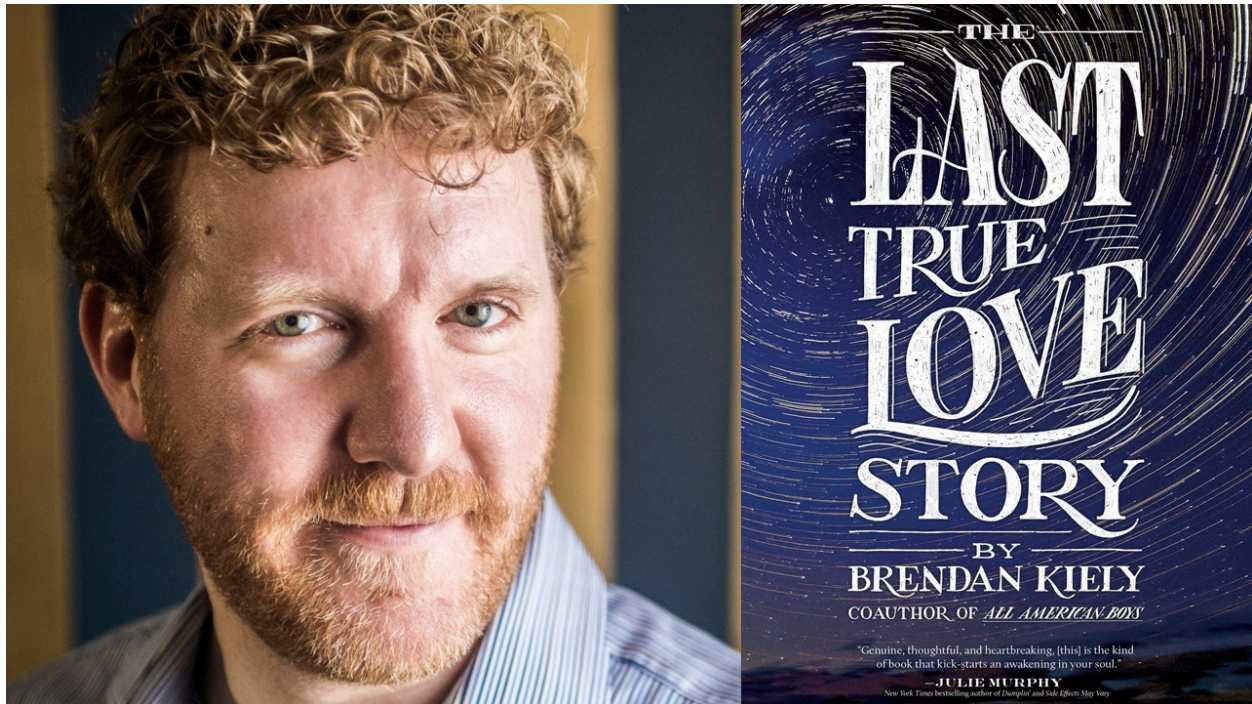


Danielle Le
ENGL 112B

The Last True Love Story

By Brendan Kiely



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

<https://www.brendankiely.com/>

Brendan Kiely, a Boston native, is a *New York Times* bestselling author; his other work include *All American Boys* (with Jason Reynolds), *Tradition*, and *The Gospel of Winter*. Kiely's work has been published in over ten languages, awarded various honors, and chosen twice as one of the American Library Association's Best Fiction for Young Adults. He currently lives in New York City with his wife.

TEXT COMPLEXITY

ATOS -

Book Level: 5.3

Interest Level: Upper Grades (9-12)

AR Points: 10.0

Dale-Chall -

Final Score: 6.4

Grade level: 7-8

Lexile -

Lexile Measure: 1100L-1200L (9-12)

Both ATOS and Lexile measure this book to be geared towards upper grades like 9-12, while Dale-Chall suggests it could also be geared towards 7-8. Due to the prominent, emotionally charged themes of death/loss and illness, this book would be better suited for 9-12 students whom would have a more developed emotional maturity than that of 7-8.

Teens should read this book because the narrative is a fun, entertaining piece that connects to both past and present and discusses emotionally charged topics like death, illness, and identity.

SYNOPSIS

With an absent, workaholic mother and a deceased dad, the only person teenager Teddy Hendrix truly has in his life is the man who raised him—his Gpa. Gpa, however, has dementia now and is slowly losing both himself and his memories. That's why Teddy makes the impossible promise to take Gpa back to his home of Ithaca, New York so that he can hold on to the memories of Gma Betty for as long as he can. Corrina, on the other hand, has two adoptive parents she can't connect with, doesn't feel like she has anyone, and is sick of the LA life she lives. So what happens when these two misfits strike up an unlikely friendship and Teddy promises to get Corrina out of LA, in exchange for her help to complete a cross-country road trip to get Gpa to Ithaca? Trouble, chaos, and love ensues.

SIGNIFICANT QUOTES

- “This made me nervous as all hell, because (a) yes, she did have a car, the latest model of a little blue Volkswagen Beetle, and she was away so often she barely rove it, and it usually just sat in out driveway taunting the hell out of me, but also (b) I was not the kind of guy who blazed into the night in my mother’s car, because I was not the kind of guy who ever got out and did anything, but there was also (c) and frankly (c) was impossible to ignore. (C) was Corrina. I’d spent the entire spring trying to imagine a reason Corrina might press her lips up against mine, and with everything that Gpa had told me about how important his memories were to him, I realized I wouldn’t have anything to look back on when I was his age, so if I didn’t get out there now and go make some of my own. I had to do something worth remembering. So I chose (d)” (28).
 - This quote is significant because this is the first time readers see Teddy take a big risk and in the name of the people he cares about—Corrina and Gpa. Throughout the novel, Teddy is shown to be pragmatic, careful and reserved. However, it is his budding friendship with Corrina and his love for Gpa that push him to be otherwise and to take chances. In this instance, Teddy goes through all the reasons in his head why he *shouldn’t* take his mother’s car for the road trip to Ithaca with Corrina, and despite all the reasons not to, he makes his own choice.
- “ ‘My dad makes these lists of my behavior patterns, but never says, *Hey, how does it feel to be a brown girl raised by white parents?* And my mom? *Honey, we don’t see race*, she says, *We only see family.*’ Corrina turned to me, and even in the dimness I could see her eyes glisten with a few tears. ‘That’s fucked up, Hendrix. It just is. Like, if you don’t see race, you don’t see *me*, Mom.’ She gestured to the space between us. ‘If I’m across the room from them at a party, no one looks at my parents and just assumes they’re my parents. They look around for brown folks’ ” (115).
 - This quote shows the first time Corrina, someone who is guarded and has many walls up, truly opens up to Teddy. Corrina, a Hispanic girl who was adopted by a Caucasian couple, is frustrated with the fact that she cannot connect to her parents on the one thing that is most important to her—her racial identity.

- “And then, leaning against the curve of the Blue Bomber, we are kissing. Why do we say we’re falling for someone when the feeling sings and swirls so much more like flying? We kiss and kiss, and not like before, it is something more, like the kisses themselves are new words in a new language and the way she holds my lips with hers, the way I hold hers with mine, I’m sure I’ve sailed right home into the uncertain I was always looking to find” (264).
 - Throughout the novel, Teddy and Corrina are both people who feel like they don’t belong anywhere. They feel as though they don’t have a home. This quote emphasizes the journey that they go on together, and how through all their trials and tribulations, they have a home in each other.

RATIONALE

Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story

- **Chapter Four: Books about Real-Life Experiences (Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living through Family and Relationship Issues)**
 - Corrina has a difficult relationship with her parents; her father is a psychologist and Corrina finds the file that he has made on her, diagnosing her emotionally damaged
 - Teddy has a strained relationship with his absent, workaholic mother; he finds out shattering secrets about his deceased father
 - It’s noted that Gpa and Gma had a strained relationship with their late son
- **Chapter Five: Books about Facing Death and Loss**
 - Teddy struggles with the lack of memories and knowledge of his deceased father throughout the whole novel; this struggle escalates when secrets are unearthed about his deceased father
 - Gpa faces the loss of his memories with his dementia, especially his memories with his deceased wife Betty—she is often brought up and stories are constantly told about her and Gpa
- **Chapter Six: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions**
 - Corrina struggles with her identity in being a Hispanic girl adopted by Caucasian parents; there are instances throughout the book where people make comments based

on her race and one scene where Teddy, Corrina, and Gpa go to a Mexican restaurant but the decorum is clearly offensive

- Teddy's issues with not knowing his deceased father play into his identity struggles; there is a scene where Gpa (in a bout of dementia) confuses Teddy for his late son

In the Classroom

- Teachers can use this book as a topic of discussion on dealing with themes like deceased family members, illness, identity struggles in the young adolescent
- Introducing this book to students—
 - Storytelling is a huge element in the book, specifically Teddy and the journal that keeps retelling the various stories of his grandparents. Ask students to retell a story of their loved ones in their own way.
 - Teddy and Corrina are two young teenagers who struggle with their identity; both struggles relate to their heritage and family dynamics. Ask students to write about a time where they felt disconnected from a community (family, friends, youth group, etc.) and discuss how it made them feel, how/if they dealt with those feelings.