



The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones

Wendelin Van Draanen

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Award-winning author Wendelin Van Draanen gives us a brilliantly fresh and funny story about a boy learning to become the brave hero of his own life. Perfect for fans of *Counting by 7s* and *The Fourteenth Goldfish*.

My secret life is filled with psychic vampires, wheelchair zombies, chain-rattlin' ghosts, and a one-eyed cat. But they're nothing compared to my real-life stalker: a sixth-grade girl named Kandi Kain. . . .

Lincoln Jones is always working on the latest story he's got going in his notebook. Those stories are his refuge. A place where the hero always prevails and the bad guy goes to jail. Real life is messy and complicated, so Lincoln sticks to fiction and keeps to himself. Which works fine until a nosy girl at his new school starts prying into his private business. She wants to know what he's writing, where he disappears to after school, and why he never talks to anybody. . . .

The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones is a terrifically funny and poignant story about a boy finding the courage to get to know the real characters all around him—and to let them know him.

The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones Details

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Author : Wendelin Van Draanen

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From Reader Review *The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones* for online ebook

Yapha says

(3.5 Stars)

Starting in a new school is tough, especially when you don't want to share the details of your life. Lincoln and his mother have managed to escape his mother's abusive boyfriend and are starting over in the north. Lincoln feels like he doesn't fit in at all, with his Southern accent, his Southern manners, and especially because he has to spend every afternoon at the eldercare facility where his mother works. Lincoln prefers to live in the fantasy world of the stories he writes. As they slowly piece their lives back together, Lincoln begins to see the real world superheroes around him. A book filled with hope and a quiet strength. Recommended for grades 4 & up.

eARC provided by publisher via NetGalley

Kimberly (Book Swoon) says

THE SECRET LIFE OF LINCOLN JONES is told through the humorous voice of an eleven-year-old Lincoln Jones, a boy who finds an escape from everyday life through his notebook where psychic vampires, wheelchair zombies, and a one-eyed cat fill the pages. Now, if he can only avoid his real life dilemma of a girl named Kandi Kain who is far too nosy, wanting to know what's in his notebooks and why he never talks to anyone.

Poignant, humorous, and with a gentle touch on themes such as bullying and dementia, *The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones* is a wonderful read for MG readers and adults to share with them.

The standout star of this young reader's book is the vibrant and quirky voice of Lincoln Jones. Through his eyes and ears, young readers can easily relate to many of the social themes touched on in an easily entertaining manner while keeping all the heart in it.

A cast of oddball characters rounds out the story, from the members of Brookside nursing home to Ms. Miller's sixth-grade classroom, they fill the pages with plenty of middle-grade upheavals and adventure.

It is this very balance of humor and a poignant coming of age story that make it so appealing. I had so many smiles and laugh-out-loud moments and even a touch of teary-eyedness. Such a sweet book.

Wendelin Van Draanen has written a book that is sure to please young readers and their parents alike. I enjoyed getting to know Lincoln Jones and seeing him become the hero of his own story and the courage to get know the larger-than-life characters who share it with him

Michelle says

Loved this story. A great introduction to parts of the world that many children don't experience. A good Thanksgiving story. A good one to read as a family to talk about Alzheimer's, death, and growing up. Even though these topics are part of the story it is not the focus and the journey of Lincoln's is a touching and comedic one. I will definitely be reading this to my children when they are in fourth grade.

Barbara says

Sixth grader Lincoln Jones has just moved to a new town and new school and endures bullying due to his politeness and Southern accent. His mother is a caregiver at a nursing home, and he spends his hours after school in the nursing home as well since she cannot afford to pay someone to watch him. He is mortally afraid that his classmates will learn how he spends his free time with the folks he calls "the oldies" (p. 3), and he is unsure about why his classmate, Kandi Kain, seems so interested in befriending him. Although his mother has warned him never to let anyone see him when she is away from the apartment, he helps a frail elderly neighbor, Mrs. Graves, who is all alone and barely surviving. Lincoln is a sweetheart and falls in love with her cats, one of whom, Jack, only has one eye. Although his life might seem incredibly bleak, given the poverty with which he is surrounded, there is something about Lincoln that is charming and disarming, and the fact that he and his mother have somehow managed to flee from an abusive situation with her former boyfriend, Cliff, provides an example that life can get better. The boy's innocence is seen in his desire for a Snickers bar, an impossible luxury, given how strapped for the cash his family is, and how patiently yet humorously he regards the residents of the nursing home, many of whom can barely remember their own names. The fact that Lincoln is always making up elaborate stories made me even more interested in reading this one as does his realization that he has plenty of true stories to tell as well as the elaborate ones he's been crafting for much of his life. Filled with heart and humor and a wonderful food fight scene on Thanksgiving, this book's last two chapters are especially poignant, testifying as they do to how each of us copes with losses and disappointments and carefully hiding our hearts and what matters so that no one else can get close enough to care.

Nat says

(More like 4.5) . . . The irony here is that I judged this book by its cover, and that is precisely what the novel is about: forming decisions based on the stories people want you to know, rather than the stories that are true. I loved Lincoln and his voice as a narrator; I felt like I knew him, and I definitely have known kids like him. While reading, I was constantly reminded of the quote attributed to Shakespeare, "be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." As far as YA goes, this book feels like a must-read for my students, particularly those who need reminding of the abundant power of kindness, the transformative power of empathy, and the unfortunate, terrible power of meanness. The world -- especially the middle school world -- needs more stories like that of Lincoln Jones.

Heather Brown says

Lincoln Jones escapes into the amazing stories that he writes - ninja pirate cats, superheroes saving the day, the clang of a cell door imprisoning the bad guys - but in real life Lincoln just hides. He has avoided making friends in school, but hasn't avoided making enemies on the school bus. School starts to change for Lincoln when popular girl Kandi takes an interest in him. She tries her hardest to make Lincoln have friends, but

everything she does seems to make things worse, at least at first. Lincoln barely manages to shake Kandi after school, but he has to keep his secrets. Every afternoon, Lincoln walks to Brookside, the Alzheimer's care center that his mom works at taking care of Pom-Pom Pam, Droolin' Stu, Tappin' Paula, and the Psychic Vampire Wilhelmina. If Kandi knew where Lincoln spent his time, he's sure he would never hear the end of it. But maybe not...maybe Kandi is a sort of super hero, and maybe so is Lincoln.

Heather says

I wish this book had gotten more notice last year. It's sweet and sad and hopeful all at once. Parts of it reminded me of Dead End in Norvelt, but less extreme. Recommended for 5th/6th grades

Ilena says

Never have I felt so polarized by a book but in such a good way. I have to say that Lincoln Jones's circumstances were so sad but yet his outlook on life made reading about his adventures so fun and entertaining. And it's been awhile since I was an eleven-year-old but I don't remember being as imaginative as Lincoln is throughout this story. So imaginative, that I seriously laughed out loud at some of his theories about life. One chapter is about "Zombie Chicken" and one chapter is about the "Vampire in Room 102." Probably my two favorite chapters because with my grown-up sensibilities, I couldn't even guess what these were about by the titles.

Lincoln Jones and his mother are living in a new city after they move to escape his mother's abusive boyfriend. The circumstances are not great because his mom doesn't have much money but she does her best to support them both. So this leaves them living in a sketchy part of town, stretching out stew by adding more water, spices, and carrots over the course of a week, and forcing Lincoln to walk to the nursing home his mother works at every day after school.

His MO is to daydream all day so as the new kid at school, it also makes him quite unpopular. Except that he catches the eye of Kandi Kain. That's right - her real name is a Christmas confectionery. She's just glad that her first name isn't "Nova" or "Hurra." Cute, right?!? And the relationship that eventually develops between these two is what Wendelin Van Draanen writes best.

But at the same time that you're starting to feel sorry for Lincoln, you fight with yourself because Lincoln has such a positive, sensible approach to reality, that you don't feel that any of it affects him negatively. In fact, it only provides more fodder for his stories. He's a writer so he's constantly thinking up stories in his head and jots them down in his notebook. The way he approaches writing made me think a little bit about the author's own approach because Lincoln is certainly a panster (no outlining), because he has no idea how his stories will evolve.

But when the gap between reality and his made-up world starts to close, that's when you realize he's been on the precipice of becoming a full-fledged young man. It makes me think of that line in scripture that says, "when I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."

If you've never read a Wendelin Van Draanen book, I highly recommend this one, as well as her other

middle grade book, Flipped (please don't watch the movie because it does not do the book justice!). Seriously, these are some of the best coming-of-age stories out there. Another one of my favorites of is her young adult title, The Running Dream. She is one of my favorite authors and I'm so glad she hasn't lost her touch with this latest title.

Bee says

Quite The Novel Idea ~ Words from the Clouds

Well, **this was utterly charming**. That's the word that pops into my head when I think of this book. Charming. There is so much to love about this book but at the same time it didn't quite reach the heights I would've wanted it to. Because it definitely could have. But I still liked it lots and lots.

So before I go forth and list all the awesome things about this book, I'm going to have to be a negative nancy for a bit and tell you **the things that I didn't like quite as much. They're small and probably mostly just me**, but I need to mention them because, hey, that's why you're here after all. I think. Maybe. Possibly. ANYWAY. So the first thing that bothered me throughout the book is this thing where the MC Lincoln's mind wanders a bit as he's talking about something, explaining things and then when he goes back to the original topic, he goes "But back to..." and that happened a lot. Especially in the beginning. And it got annoying after a while. It's a silly thing to complain about, I know, but there you go. The second thing is that **I don't feel like this book dug as deep into the heart of the story as it could have**. Like it only scratched the surface and could have gone SO much deeper and touched my heart SO much more. But that could just be me. All of this. It's just the things that irked me while reading, please be aware of that.

OKAY, so now that that's over and done with, I can go on and talk about the things I LOVE about this book. Starting with the writing. Other than that tiny little thing I mentioned earlier, **the writing was very very lovely**. It was easy to read and easy to get sucked into and it did hit me in the feels a bit at some points. That, combined with fairly short chapters, made this a very quick read to me. And I liked that. And with the writing also came **the fantastic voice of the main character Lincoln. I LOVED his voice. And I adore him**. He's such a precious little munchkin and I just want to cuddle him and wrap him in blankets. He was also fairly relatable to me in some ways. Like how he writes stories and is kind of socially awkward a bit and tends to hide in those stories he writes. That was very much me at that age. I loved following him through this story and seeing him grow. **I also loved the other characters, who were all very layered no matter how small their role was**. But one of my favorite things of this book was Lincoln's relationship with his mom. It is SO awesome to see great parent-child relationships in books. I love that. And **I loved the bond between Lincoln and his mom. All the love for those two**. OH and male POV ftw. Seriously.

***The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones* is a very charming and quite touching middle grade book that I do absolutely encourage you to read**. It has a great voice, lovely writing and super-likable characters. So what more do you want, really? Go forth and read it, I say.

Cariadne says

How can anyone not fall in love with Lincoln Jones? Lovers of fine books will recognize elements of themselves in him -- curious, imaginative, compassionate. This is my first book from Wendelin Van Draanen

and I am sooo impressed by the singular narration unique to Lincoln Jones. Her writing felt like it was written in the past (mainly because Lincoln's Southern drawl felt very retro) but it was set in modern day, which makes me think this could be a timeless classic. (I haven't read a voice as fresh or relevant since *The Mighty Miss Malone*.)

Highly recommend.

Ms. St. Jean says

(Goodreads blurb)

Lincoln Jones is always working on the latest story he's got going in his notebook. Those stories are his refuge. A place where the hero always prevails and the bad guy goes to jail. Real life is messy and complicated, so Lincoln sticks to fiction and keeps to himself. Which works fine until a nosy girl at his new school starts prying into his private business. She wants to know what he's writing, where he disappears to after school, and why he never talks to anybody. . . .

The Secret Life of Lincoln Jones is a terrifically funny and poignant story about a boy finding the courage to get to know the real characters all around him—and to let them know him.

Caradith Craven says

Wendelin Van Draanen's latest novel will capture the reader's heart from the hilarious first page to the poignant final chapter. The story of Lincoln Jones and his struggle to understand and cope with the difficulties of his everyday life is beautifully told in this first-person narrative.

Lincoln Jones's secret life centers around the world of the residents at the Brookside Memory Care facility where he goes every day after school to hang out and do his homework until his 'ma' gets off work. Lincoln struggles with fitting in at his new school, understanding the child-like world of the dementia patients at Brookside, coping with living in a one-room apartment with no heat, and dealing with the memory of being abused by his mother's boyfriend.

Lincoln escapes the reality of his life through writing fiction stories in his notebook. He has a difficult time opening up and sharing his true feelings. It's easier to live in a world of make believe than to deal with his real life. It is through his encounters with an elderly next-door neighbor, a pesky, 'in-his-business' girl at school, and the delightful residents at Brookside that he comes to understand the true meaning of community, caring, compassion, and friendship.

Wendelin Van Draanen has created characters in this story that readers will be cheering for to the end as they deal with the everyday struggles of living. The cross-generational relationships are especially heartwarming and poignant. This book has Newbery Award potential and should be on the shelf of every school and public library; I just finished the ARC and will purchase several copies in October to put on my middle school library shelves. It deserves a wide reading audience of all ages and reading interests.

Debbie Ohi says

I recently read *THE SECRET LIFE OF LINCOLN JONES* by Wendelin Van Draanen (Knopf Books For Young Readers) and thoroughly enjoyed it. The narrator is 11-year-old Lincoln, who keeps secrets in his notebook. His voice is fresh, funny and I love how he sees the world.

One of his secrets: In the afternoons, Lincoln hangs out at Brookside, a home for people with memory loss and dementia where his mother works. Something else I loved about this story: how Lincoln's observations about his mom and "the crazies" (residents of the home) gradually changes as his understanding deepens.

Unlike many books whose characters include those with dementia, *THE SECRET LIFE OF LINCOLN JONES* isn't about a beloved relative of the main character who has dementia. Nothing wrong with this, of course, but sometimes this can make a book too sad/heavy for some young (and not-so-young) readers. This story, on the other hand, is laugh-aloud funny in many bits and is much more about family, friendships and coming-of-age.

It is SO well-written. Love the language. Love how Lincoln's quirky observations about the people around him are often infused with both humor and compassion.

This would be a great book for any young person who has relatives starting to experience dementia, but who doesn't want a heavy and potentially depressing story. The focus is on the characters and story, NOT the issue of dementia. and especially about Lincoln's coming-of-age.

SO many wonderful, moving moments.

- Like when Lincoln realizes that every person at Brookside had his or her own story, a life before they developed dementia.

- Like when Lincoln realizes something about his mom. "More than any of the heroes in my stories, more than any other person I'd ever known, Ma was brave. Truly brave." Which makes him understand that he could brave, too.

Donna says

Enjoyed other books by Van Draanen but really enjoyed this one! Lincoln is a great narrator and tells his story with heart.

As the new kid in town, Lincoln is having a hard time making friends. He is being ignored at school and bullied on the bus. He and his mother have escaped an abusive relationship and it has been a long time since Lincoln has had friends. Meeting his mother at her work, a nursing home, after school everyday doesn't help. When Lincoln inadvertently ignores the popular girl, Kandi, she suddenly has him on her radar and won't stop pestering him. Over the next month Lincoln learns more about his classmates, the various patients at the home, and more about his mother and how brave she really has been.

The characters are true, the situation is realistic, and Lincoln grows as a character in the few short months we spend with him. I also love that it is his teacher and Kandi who break him out of his mold and give him hope for the future.

Leeanna says

This review originally appeared on my blog, Leeanna.me.

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I'm always intrigued by books about kids who write stories. I started writing when I was a kid, so I usually feel a bit of kinship with the characters. I want to know why they write, what sort of stories they create.

In **THE SECRET LIFE OF LINCOLN JONES**, Lincoln's notebooks of stories are the only sentimental thing he took with him when he and his mom escaped her abusive boyfriend. In their new home, Lincoln continues to write as a way to escape having to spend his afternoons at the nursing home where his mom works, as well as being in a new school.

I loved Lincoln's voice. I often felt like he was sitting next to me, telling me every new adventure. I really felt for Lincoln and his mom; they have such a great bond. How many times do characters have neglectful or absent parents? So often it's a trope. It was great to see how close Lincoln and his mom are, and also **to see Lincoln realize just how hard his mom works to give him a better life.** I'd say that's a thing kids don't often recognize -- I know I didn't -- so hopefully seeing Lincoln get it will help other kids see it too.

I also liked Lincoln's observations about the nursing home, Brookside. Sure, he's not always respectful of the residents -- he calls them "crazies" or "oldies" -- but I didn't mind that. I was around Lincoln's age (11) when I first went to a nursing home to visit a relative, and let me tell you, it's hard. I still remember it, and I went at 30 and feeling the same way. **So, I hope Lincoln's observations and moments of "ohhh, these are people too" help kids see it isn't that scary.**

I very much enjoyed **THE SECRET LIFE OF LINCOLN JONES**, and was sad to see the book end. Don't worry -- the book ends in a good spot and in a good way. **But I was a little sad to say goodbye to Lincoln!**

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Disclosure:

Disclosure: I received a copy of this book from the publisher for review consideration; this did not influence my review in any way.

See more of my reviews:
