Absolutely Almost

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GENRE: Realistic Fiction
LEXILE: 750

SUMMARY:
Albie is a half-Korean 10-year-old living in New York City. He frequently disappoints his parents and teachers by almost reaching expectations. After being dismissed from an expensive private school, Albie begins 5th grade at a nearby public school. His mother also hires a tutor to help improve his academic performance. As he learns to make new friends and handle a bully, his tutor helps him see his inner strength and sensitivity.

BOOKTALK:
Albie has never quite met the expectations of anyone. He always falls just short of the mark - with his parents, his teachers, and his classmates. When he has to go to a new school for 5th grade, Albie is upset that he must leave his best friend and start anew. He also has to deal with a bully at the new school. And to top it all off, his mom hires Calista, a college student, to be his nanny and help him with his school work. How will Albie handle his bully? Will almost ever be enough? Read the book and find out!

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Other books written by the author:
The Thing About Georgie
Umbrella Summer
Sophie Simon Solves Them All
Double Dog Dare
A Tangle of Knots
The Life and Crimes of Bernetta Wallflower
Lost in the Sun

CHALLENGING WORDS
bodega (p. 9): noun a small grocery story
foresight (p. 15): noun the ability to predict the future
borough (p. 22): noun a district in New York City (there are five)
guffaw (p. 84): noun a loud and hearty laugh
wretched (p. 104) adjective of poor quality, very bad
**putrid** (p. 104) *adjective* very unpleasant, disgusting

**abomination** (p. 104) *noun* a thing that causes disgust or hatred

**valedictorian** (p. 115) *noun* a student having the highest academic achievement in the class

**dyslexia** (p. 121) *noun* a disorder that involves difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letter, and other symbols

**perspective** (p. 128) *noun* a way of drawing objects that gives the correct impression of the height, width, depth, and position when viewed from a particular point

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
1. Why do you think Erlan really doesn’t want to be on a reality TV show? (lights.camera. p. 13-20)
2. Why did Mr. Clifton display his report card? (being where you’ve been. p. 82-84)
3. After Albie plays football with Darren in the park, Calista talks to him. Why does Calista tell Albie “Sometimes people aren’t always nice for good reasons”? What do you think she means by this? (friends. p.145-150)
4. After joining Darren and the other “cool” kids at school, Albie starts learning some of the rules about being cool. He leaves notes for Betsy with tips on what to do to be cool. How do you think Betsy feels about these notes? Why do you think she never follows any of these helpful hints? (helpful hints. p.162-164)
5. “You can’t get where you’re going without being where you’ve been.” This quote is repeated several times in the story. What do you think it means? At the end of the story, Albie says, “And you couldn’t be anywhere at all without having been almost there for a while.” How does this reflect the changes that Albie has gone through in the story? Compare his feelings about himself from the beginning of the book to his feelings at the end of the book.

**ACTIVITIES WITH STANDARDS:**

**Language Arts:**

- At the end of the story, Albie finds out that Calista has visited the bodega and asked about him. How do you think they would react if they ran into each other? Write an additional chapter to the book describing their meeting and what they would say to each other.

**ELA Standard: 4.W.3.3** Write narrative compositions in a variety of forms that-
- Establish an introduction, with a context to allow the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.
- Organize events that unfold naturally, using meaningful paragraphing
and transitional words and phrases.
- Use dialogue and descriptive details to develop events and reveal characters’ personalities, feelings, and responses to situations.
- Employ vocabulary with sufficient sensory (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) details to give clear pictures of ideas and events.
- Provide an ending that follows the narrated experiences or events.

**Science:**

- In the book, Albie and Calista visit the Bronx Zoo. While they are there, they are especially excited to see the gorillas and the python feeding on a pig. Both of these animals are well-suited to live in their specific habitats. Research an animal that you can find at the Bronx Zoo. In your presentation, be sure to address the following:
  1. Describe the animal’s habitat
  2. Describe the animal’s preferred food
  3. Describe the physical adaptations the animal has that allow it to survive in its environment.

  **Science Standard: 4.3.2** Observe, compare and record the physical characteristics of living plants or animals from widely different environments. Describe how each plant or animal is adapted to its environment.

**Social Studies:**

- This story is based in New York City which is divided into 5 boroughs. Create a brochure advertising one of the boroughs to tourists. Be sure to include:
  1. A map showing the location of the borough within the city.
  2. Major tourist attractions including landmarks, events, and destinations.
  3. A description of the personality of the borough. Is it known for art and culture, sports, business, shopping?
  4. Selected pictures to highlight important areas!

  **Social Studies Standard: 5.3.2** Identify and describe cultural and physical regions of the United States.

**RELATED INTERNET SITES:**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
[www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)
Visit the famous art museum that Albie’s mom suggests in the story.

American Museum of Natural History
Explore some of the exhibits from one of Albie’s favorite museums.
The Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum
http://www.intrepidmuseum.org/
Explore some of the exhibits from one of Albie’s favorite museums.

A-10 Thunderbolt
Fact sheet about the A-10 Thunderbolt from the U.S. Air Force.

Bronx Zoo
http://bronxzoo.com
Learn about some of the animals and exhibits that Albie and Callista visited.

New York City Boroughs and Neighborhoods
http://www.nycgo.com/neighborhoods
A virtual guide through the neighborhoods of New York City with details on landmarks, attractions, and personality.

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