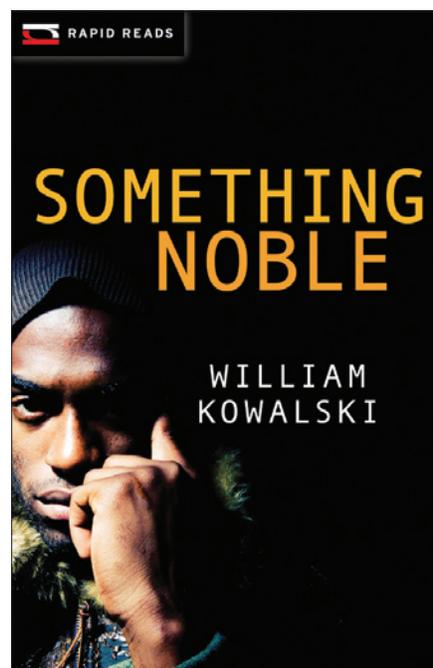


READING  
GUIDESOMETHING NOBLE  
WILLIAM KOWALSKI

Reading level: 3.0  
Interest level: Adult  
Themes: family, personal sacrifice, responsibility  
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**Summary**

Linda Gonzalez lives with her two sons, Dre (sixteen) and Marco (six). She works hard as a continuing care assistant. It's good work, but she can't get enough of it. But to get a full-time job at minimum wage would mean a drop in their standard of living. Although Linda owns her own home, it's in a rough part of town. She's bringing up her boys to be good people, though—no drugs, good grades, keeping their noses clean.

Although their marriage is over, Marco's dad, Ernest, hangs around the family, hoping Linda will take him back after cheating on her. But while Linda has no plans to get back with Ernest, she does appreciate him for his willingness to look after Marco—and now Dre—when she heads to work.

When Linda gets a call that Dre's been rushed to the hospital, every bad scenario runs through her head. She learns Dre's kidneys are failing, and while dialysis is a temporary measure that will keep him alive, he's going to need a kidney transplant if he's going to have any chance of living a normal life. It's not like Linda can afford this. Since Dre's been feeling unwell he's been unable to work—and the loss of his paper route means the loss of that extra \$300 for the family every month. But it's not like there's any other choice.

Because Dre has such a rare blood type, he's going to be on the donor list a very long time—unless Linda can find a match.

Terrell, Dre's deadbeat biological father, has spent most of his adult life in jail. And that's just where Linda finds him when she goes to look for matches for Dre's kidney. Terrell, however, isn't a candidate for the transplant because he's been an intravenous drug user in the past. To Linda's surprise, however, Terrell coughs up the name of another of his sons, a boy named LeVon, who shares the same rare blood type.

LeVon lives on the streets, dealing drugs in the projects. Linda summons her courage and heads to the central part of the projects, where all the bad stuff goes down. She's terrified when she recognizes LeVon as the guy who mugged her a few months back—but her kid's life is on the line. Undeterred, she makes contact with LeVon and invites him to her place for dinner, where he can have a chance to meet his brother. LeVon laughs and calls her crazy. But when Linda helps him escape certain arrest just a few days later, he decides he's got nothing to lose.





LeVon storms out when he realizes he's being wooed for his internal organs. But when he finds himself in the slammer for a deal, he knows he's got a get-out-of-jail-free pass with a kidney donation.

As the family comes to know LeVon through the organ donation process, it becomes apparent that he's just another kid who got dealt a crummy hand. When the surgery is finished and both boys are back on their feet, LeVon's going to come and live with Linda—get off the streets and take another shot at getting things right. But while Dre comes through the transplant with flying colors, LeVon falls prey to a superbug. The boy dies, leaving behind a legacy that gives his half-brother a new lease on life.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Linda Gonzalez describes her life in chapter 1 of *Something Noble*:

*My life has never been boring. I'm not an important or exciting person, but sometimes some pretty wild things happen to me. Usually they don't come right on top of each other like this though.*

Describe your life in three sentences.

2. In the doctor's office, Linda chatters to Dre about inane things, just to keep her mind off the stress of their situation. She explains that when she gets nervous, she talks. What do you do when you're nervous?
3. What do you know about Dre's personality by the end of chapter 1? How does the author establish these traits?
4. Linda would like her ex-husband, Ernest, to simply vanish—but they share a child together, and she needs his help to raise Marco. So she compromises, putting up with him in order to get what she needs. How does poverty influence a person's need to make compromises? Do you think rich people compromise less?
5. When Ernest informs Linda that Dre has been taken to the hospital, she asks God to make it nothing serious, saying she can't handle one more thing right now. But it is serious. And somehow she does handle it. Somehow we all do. Whether you believe in God or just the power of the human spirit, you've heard the expression, *God never gives you more than you can handle*. Have you experienced this in your own life? How is it that we can be this way?
6. In chapter 3, Linda leaves for the hospital to find out what's wrong with her son, riding "the slowest bus on the planet." In literature, this kind of exaggeration is called hyperbole. How is the hyperbole effective in this case?
7. When Linda finds out Dre needs a new kidney, one of her first thoughts is how they'll pay for it. Then she pushes the thought away, reminding herself that money is temporary. How so? How do we lose sight of this so easily?
8. Linda visits Terrell in jail to inquire into his suitability as a kidney donor for her son. When Terrell agrees, Linda decides not to tell Dre anything about his real reason for donating. "Let him think he has a father who cares. Let him feel for once that the world isn't a completely cold and hard place" (chapter 5). What's your stance on the world? Cold and hard? Or essentially good? Explain.





9. In the housing projects, Linda observes that everyone living there is doing so with some form of government assistance. “All these safety nets are a good thing,” she says. “But they were never meant to keep people going forever. They’re just supposed to use them until they can stand on their own” (chapter 7). What’s your take on her conviction that poverty is a state of mind—and that that’s the hardest part to change? What does she mean by this? Discuss the pros and cons of the social safety net.
10. In chapter 9, Linda thinks that all she wants is for her kids to be safe and to have a decent shot at a good life. But she also recognizes that life isn’t fair. Compare *Something Noble* to a different book you’ve read where the characters also struggle with life’s unfairness.
11. “My mama used to say that a person should always be either working or sleeping, never just sitting still. It’s when you’re doing nothing that you start to fall apart, little by little,” observes Linda as she spends an afternoon in dialysis with Dre (chapter 10). How is her mother correct?
12. Linda needs to work more hours so she can make more money. She could take a minimum-wage job, but that wouldn’t sustain her family. She says the system makes it so people can’t afford to work, and muses that it’s no wonder people go on welfare. What solution would you propose?
13. Linda visits LeVon when he ends up in jail. Even though he’s there for something he didn’t do, he shrugs philosophically. “He has no expectations from his life” (chapter 12). How is this observation similar to the Buddha’s teachings to release all expectations? How is it different? How is LeVon’s outlook advantageous, given his lifestyle?
14. How do you feel about LeVon dying? For what reason do you think the author chose to “kill him off”?
15. Linda has forgiven her ex-husband, Ernest, for his mistakes. “It’s the greatest gift you can give yourself,” she says (chapter 15). Why?
16. As you see it, what is the main message of this story?

