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BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

# INTRODUCTION

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (GLBTQ) literature for young adults has grown and changed in the past 40 years from the whispered mention of a character's homosexuality to books which treat GLBTQ teens as straight teens have been treated in YA literature for years—people struggling with their identity, their families, their love lives, and all the emotions which come with being human. No longer is the GLBTQ character doomed to a painful secrecy or a lifetime of misery. Young people need to see characters they can relate to in books they read, and many times, teens can completely relate to a gay character's struggle with identity because they too are struggling with their own identity, perhaps not their sexual identity but one of the other facets which make up who each one of us is. In many situations, relationship issues are relationship issues. Problems with parents and friends, trying to fit in with peers and finding their own place in the world are things every teenager faces—gay or straight, black or white, Christian or Muslim. GLBTQ literature offers one more piece in the puzzle that is a teenager and provides comfort and support for all young people because the struggles of growing up are universal.

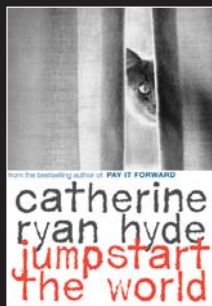
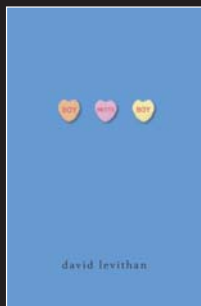
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Boy Meets Boy* has been described as a revolutionary gay novel. Discuss whether or not this is the case in your opinion, using the other four books for examples.
- Regardless of what issue you're facing, the support of family and/or friends is one of the most important ingredients for a successful resolution to the problem. How is this true in each of these books? Or how does the lack of support make the problem even more challenging?
- In *What They Always Tell Us*, we see the many situations from the viewpoint of both James and Alex. This gives us the unusual privilege of seeing "both sides" of the story. Choose a character from one of the other stories and supply the "other side" of a pivotal event.
- Take three characters from three different books and create a plot outline for a new story. What characters from different stories do you think should interact? What might happen if they did? Would there be

more acceptance or less when you put your three characters together?

- Historically, suicide and unexpected deaths often figure in to GLBTQ literature. How does suicide figure into these stories? Has the suicide angle been used too much in this collection of stories? Why do you think that suicide and unexpected deaths figure so prominently in GLBTQ literature still? How has Levithan changed that model in *Boy Meets Boy* and is it successful?
- Could any of these books have survived as stories if there were no gay plot? For example, what if Alex and Nathen (*What They Always Tell Us*) were a boy and a girl (Alexandra and Nathen)? How would the story have to be changed? Does the “gayness” ultimately matter in whether it’s a good story or not? Does the plot resemble any other plots you’ve read? If you’ve read *Romeo and Juliet*, think about the similarities and differences between the heterosexual relationship and the homosexual relationship.
- Discuss the different reactions that people have when they discover their friend or family member’s homosexuality. What makes the responses so different in each of the individual situations? In particular, what response does Logan in *Almost Perfect* have initially? How does this change? Do you think it’s a valid change or do you feel this change in attitude never could have happened? Why do you feel that way?
- What is the importance of seemingly minor characters in the books? Why is the story of Henry included in *What They Always Tell Us*? What part does Robbie play in Johanna and Reeve’s story in *Rage: A Love Story*?
- The statement is made in *Jumpstart the World* that Frank’s transgenderism makes him fearful of hospitals and jails. What other situations could a transgendered person be fearful of? What can be done in our society to reasonably alleviate some of those fears?
- It is often said that it’s easier for GLBTQ people in big cities. In fact, Frank and Molly (*Jumpstart the World*) leave New York City with a great deal of trepidation because they are moving back to the South. Does place play a role in how the GLBTQ characters are treated in each of the stories? Do you think it is easier to be gay in a big city rather than a small town? In the South? In different countries? Why or why not?

# FEATURED BOOKS



## Almost Perfect

Brian Katcher

Grades 9 up • Delacorte Press

PB: 978-0-385-73665-7

HC: 978-0-385-73664-0 • GLB: 978-0-385-90620-3

Logan wishes he never acted on his feelings for Sage when she finally discloses her big secret: she's actually a boy. Enraged, frightened, and feeling betrayed, Logan lashes out at Sage and disowns her. But once Logan comes to terms with what happened, he reaches out to Sage in an attempt to understand her situation. But Logan has no idea how rocky the road back to friendship will be.

★“An accessible tone that will resonate with teens.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

## Boy Meets Boy

David Levithan

Grades 7 up • Alfred A. Knopf

PB: 978-0-375-83299-4

This is the story of Paul, a sophomore at a high school like no other: The cheerleaders ride Harleys, the homecoming queen used to be a guy named Daryl (she now prefers Infinite Darlene and is also the star quarterback), and the gay-straight alliance was formed to help the straight kids learn how to dance.

★“This is arguably the most important gay novel since *Annie on My Mind* and seems to represent a revolution in the publishing of gay-themed books for adolescents.”

—*Booklist*, Starred

## Jumpstart the World

Catherine Ryan Hyde

Grades 9 up • Alfred A. Knopf

HC: 978-0-375-86665-4 • GLB: 978-0-375-96665-1

Elle is falling hard for her new neighbor Frank. When she discovers that he is transgender, her

world is turned upside down. But when an accident nearly takes Frank's life, Elle must search inside herself to find not only the true meaning of friendship, but also her own role in jumpstarting the world.

## Rage: A Love Story

Julie Anne Peters

Grades 9 up • Alfred A. Knopf

PB: 978-0-375-84411-9

HC: 978-0-375-85209-1 • GLB: 978-0-375-95209-8

Johanna is steadfast, patient, reliable—the go-to girl, the one everyone can count on. Reeve is fierce, beautiful, wounded, elusive—a flame that draws Johanna's fluttering moth. Johanna is determined to get her, against all advice, and to help her, against all reason. But love isn't always reasonable, right?

In the precarious place where attraction and need collide, a teenager experiences the dark-side of a first love, and struggles to find her way into a new light.

## What They Always Tell Us

Martin Wilson

Grades 9 up • Delacorte Press

PB: 978-0-385-73508-7

HC: 978-0-385-73507-0 • GLB: 978-0-385-90500-8

James and Alex have barely anything in common anymore—least of all their experiences in high school, where James is a popular senior and Alex is suddenly an outcast. But at home, there is Henry, the precocious 10-year-old across the street, who eagerly befriends them both. And when Alex takes up running, there is James's friend Nathen, who unites the brothers in moving and unexpected ways.

★“Insightfully evoked, Alex, James and their friends will leave a lasting impression on readers.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

# GLBTQ

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### **GLSEN—the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network**

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

The mission of GLSEN is to educate teachers and students about safe schools. The Safe Space Kit has recently been updated to include a great resource about being an ally.

### **The Rainbow Project List**

[rainbowlist.wordpress.com](http://rainbowlist.wordpress.com)

A yearly bibliography of recommended titles with GLBTQ content for children from birth to age 18.

### **I'm Here and I'm Queer and What the Hell Do I Read?**

[www.leewind.org](http://www.leewind.org)

An award-winning blog started in 2007 by a 16-year-old teen boy who welcomes everyone and provides intriguing GLBTQ news, as well as book reviews and discussions.

### **PFLAG—Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

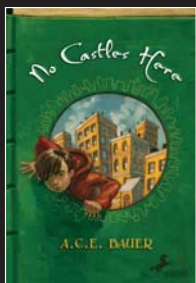
This is a family-friendly organization that supports GLBTQ persons of any age.

### **Teaching Tolerance**

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

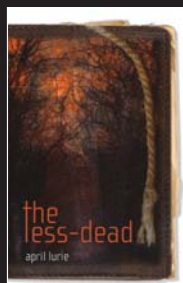
Free materials for educators about all aspects of tolerance and acceptance for all, including GLBTQ youth. There are many curricular materials and activities as well as information for teachers and students, grades K–12.

# MORE GLBTQ LITERATURE



## No Castles Here

A.C.E. Bauer  
 Grades 4–8  
 Yearling PB:  
 978-0-375-83922-1  
 Random House HC:  
 978-0-375-83921-4  
 GLB: 978-0-375-93921-1



## The Less-Dead

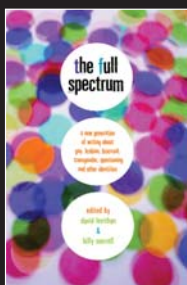
April Lurie  
 Grades 9 up  
 Delacorte Press  
 HC: 978-0-385-73675-6  
 GLB: 978-0-385-90626-5



## The Last Exit to Normal

Michael Harmon  
 Grades 9 up  
 Laurel-Leaf PB:  
 978-0-440-23994-9  
 Alfred A. Knopf HC:  
 978-0-375-84098-2

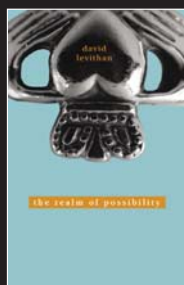
## FROM DAVID LEVITHAN:



## The Full Spectrum:

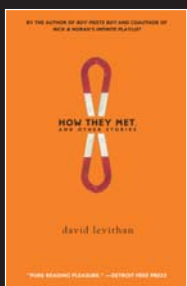
A NEW GENERATION OF WRITING ABOUT GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING, AND OTHER IDENTITIES

Edited with Billy Merrell  
 Grades 7 up  
 Alfred A. Knopf  
 PB: 978-0-375-83290-1



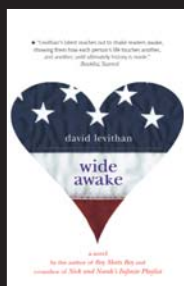
## The Realm of Possibility

Grades 7 up  
 Alfred A. Knopf  
 PB: 978-0-375-83657-2  
 HC: 978-0-375-82845-4



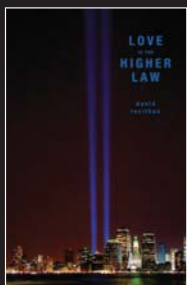
## How They Met and Other Stories

Grades 9 up  
 Alfred A. Knopf  
 PB: 978-0-375-84323-5  
 HC: 978-0-375-84886-5  
 GLB: 978-0-375-94886-2



## Wide Awake

Grades 9 up  
 Alfred A. Knopf  
 PB: 978-0-375-83467-7



## Love Is the Higher Law

Grades 7 up  
 Alfred A. Knopf  
 PB: 978-0-375-83469-1  
 HC: 978-0-375-83468-4  
 GLB: 978-0-375-93468-1



[www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)