

## About the Book

Jazz Jennings is one of the youngest and most prominent voices in the national discussion about gender identity. At the age of five, Jazz transitioned to life as a girl, with the support of her parents. A year later, her parents allowed her to share her incredible journey in her first Barbara Walters interview, aired at a time when the public was much less knowledgeable about or accepting of the transgender community. This groundbreaking interview was followed over the years by other high-profile interviews, a documentary, the launch of her YouTube channel, a picture book, and her own reality TV series, *I Am Jazz*, making her one of the most recognizable activists for transgender teens, children, and adults.

In her remarkable memoir, Jazz reflects on these very public experiences and how they have helped shape the mainstream attitude toward the transgender community. But it hasn't all been easy. Jazz has faced many challenges, including bullying, discrimination, and rejection, yet she perseveres as she educates others about her life as a transgender teen. Through it all her family has been beside her, standing together against those who don't understand the true meaning of acceptance and unconditional love. Now Jazz must learn to navigate the physical, social, and emotional upheavals of adolescence—particularly high school—complicated by the unique challenges of being a transgender teen. Making the journey from girl to woman is never easy—especially when you began your life in a boy's body.



Grades 7 and up

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## About the Author

Jazz Jennings is a trans girl, YouTube celebrity, spokesmodel, activist, and co-author of the picture book *I Am Jazz*. She has a docuseries about her life, also called *I Am Jazz*, on TLC, which started airing in July 2015. She was named one of *Time*'s "Most Influential Teens" two years in a row, was one of *Huffington Post*'s "14 Most Fearless Teens," and was the youngest person ever featured on *Out*'s "Out 100," as well as on *Advocate*'s "40 Under 40" list. In 2014, she was named a Human Rights Campaign Youth Ambassador and received Logo TV's Youth Trailblazer Award. Jazz also hosts a series of videos about her life on YouTube and is the face of Clean & Clear's ad campaign. You can follow her on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at @jazzjennings—, or subscribe to her YouTube channel.



## Suggested Reading

***Beast*** by Brie Spangler (grade 7 and up)

A witty, wise, and heart-wrenching novel that will appeal to fans of Rainbow Rowell and David Levithan. There is something Dylan doesn't know about Jamie, something she shared when he wasn't listening, something that shouldn't change a thing. She is who she's always been—an amazing photographer and devoted friend, who also happens to be transgender. But will Dylan see it that way?

***Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*** by Amy Ellis Nutt (grade 9 and up)

The inspiring true story of a transgender girl, her identical twin brother, and an ordinary American family's extraordinary journey to understand, nurture, and celebrate the uniqueness in us all.

***Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*** by Susan Kuklin (grade 9 and up)

Kuklin interviews six transgender or non-binary teens and, combining these interviews with photographs, presents six very different lives and experiences.

***Double Exposure*** by Bridget Birdsall (grade 9 and up)

Alyx Atlas knows that she is a girl, even though she is intersex and has been raised as a boy. After she and her mother move from their home to a different state so that Alyx can start over as a girl, they experience some obstacles they never expected, and Alyx is outed by a teammate who questions whether Alyx is really the gender she claims she is.

***Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws***

by Kate Bornstein (grade 9 and up)

Celebrated transsexual trailblazer Kate Bornstein has, with more humor and spunk than any other, ushered us into a world of limitless possibility through a daring re-envisionment of the gender system as we know it.

***Lily and Dunkin*** by Donna Gephart (grade 5 and up)

A compelling dual narrative about two remarkable young people: Lily, a transgender girl, and Dunkin, a boy dealing with bipolar disorder. Their powerful story will shred your heart, then stitch it back together with kindness, humor, bravery, and love.

***Luna*** by Julie Anne Peters (grade 9 and up)

Liam's sister Regan is the only one who knows that like the luna moth, he reveals his true self at night. When he decides to show his female self at school, Regan fears for his safety.

***Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition*** by Katie Rain Hill (grade 9 and up)

In her unique, generous, and affecting voice, nineteen-year-old Katie Hill shares her personal journey of undergoing gender reassignment.

## Praise for BEING JAZZ:

★ "[Jazz's] story is an important addition to the slender but growing body of transgender literature and belongs in every library."

—Booklist, Starred

This guide was created by Lynn Evarts, a middle school and high school media specialist for over thirty years and a passionate LGBTQ ally for her entire life.



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## Discussion Guide

# JAZZ JENNINGS







# Being a transgender teen

Imagine feeling like you've been born in the wrong body. Imagine looking at yourself in the mirror and seeing a boy body, even though you know you are a girl. For transgender kids, there is a mismatch between the sex they are assigned at birth (whether their anatomy is male or female) and their gender identity (whether they identify themselves as a boy or a girl based on their own sense of self). This mismatch, called gender dysphoria, can lead to anxiety, and depression if not acknowledged. Gender dysphoria is not about personal interests and hobbies or even sexual orientation (such as gay or lesbian). It is not about who a person is romantically or sexually attracted to but about who a person feels they are in their own inner core. Transgender people want to present themselves to the world and be recognized as a man or a woman based on their own gender identity—their true gender. Celebrities such as Chaz Bono, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner have recently spoken out about being transgender, and this visibility has made transgender youth more visible as well, helping teens all over the United States understand the difference between biological sex and gender identity. *Being Jazz* gives us a peek into the life of Jazz Jennings—artist, athlete, and transgender teen—who just wants to live life her own way and help others be happy with who they are.

## Discussion Questions

**1. Jazz believes in supporting all kinds of differences in people, not just gender identity or sexual orientation.**

- How is Jazz an advocate for acceptance?
- How does Jazz deal with bullying? How do you?
- How do you help people be accepted for who they are?

**2. Jazz talks about being called brave, but she doesn't feel brave.**

- What does *brave* mean? What characteristics do brave people share?
- Who does Jazz feel is brave? Why does she feel that way?

**3. Our society operates within a binary system of gender identity.**

- Do you think this system will remain the norm throughout your lifetime?
- If you believe there will be changes, how do you believe people's ideas about gender identity change? Will people see more than two genders.
- Are there norms that are more difficult to change? Why?
- How do you believe the generation gap affects the acceptance of transgender people?

**4. Jazz talks about the issues she had playing soccer and tennis on organized teams. Because she was assigned male at birth, she had to wait for a ruling by the Florida High School Athletic Association before she could play on the female team. This has been an issue not only for high-school athletes but for athletes at all levels.**

- Do you think it's fair for transgender people to play on the team that matches how they live everyday as opposed to the team that matches their biological sex at birth? Why, or why not?
- How do you see this conversation evolving in the future, especially with more transgender athletes coming forward? What are some specific problems that athletic communities—from recreational to professional—will face?

**5. Why is it rude to say to a transgender person that you weren't able to tell that they were trans?**

- What stereotypes does this reinforce?
- What is a better way to react to meeting someone who is transgender (if that is information you have when you meet them)?

**6. Jazz talks about a censorship issue in her picture book *I Am Jazz*. In 2015, three of the top ten books on the American Library Association's Top Ten Most Challenged Books are books that deal with being transgender or gay, including Jazz's book.**

- If you were a librarian, and a parent came to you and told you that you had to remove one of these books, how would you respond?
- What reasons would you give for keeping the book on the shelf?
- Ultimately, whose choice is it to have controversial books available in libraries?

**7. There has been a great deal of press lately about some states saying that you must use the bathroom that corresponds to your biological sex (the sex you were assigned at birth), despite a Federal guidelines stating that all schools must allow transgender kids to use the bathroom and locker room of their chosen gender.**

- Do you support this? Why, or why not?
- How does this conversation apply to school locker rooms? Is there a difference?
- How do you think the school you attend would handle the issue Jazz had with the bathroom?

**8. Jazz's mom says that the lowest point she experienced before she fully accepted Jazz's transition was that "I would no longer have three little boys and one girl. That my whole family dynamic was going to change." (p. 238).**

- Talk about how Jazz's transition affected not only her life but the lives of her family and siblings.
- How could you offer support to a family that was going through this transition?
- How does Jazz's family support her?

**9. After reading Jazz's book, what advice would you give to a friend who tells you that they are transgender?**

- What websites would give the most reliable information?
- What advice would you give regarding coming out to others?

**10. Jazz's book is filled with mostly positive stories, but one story that ends sadly is the story of Angeline.**

- What are things you need to be aware of if you are afraid that someone you know might be in danger of attempting suicide?

## Building a Culture of Acceptance

"If we come together and get past our differences, then our world will begin evolving from black-and-white and we'll transition into a beautiful place of colors—a rainbow of love, peace, freedom, and equality."—Jazz Jennings

**Librarians and educators have a powerful role in the lives of their patrons and students. This role gives them the unique opportunity to let all young people know that the library or classroom is a space of acceptance for all. Some ways you can further this idea include:**

1. Own and promote books that enlighten teens about controversial issues. By being seen reading them or by displaying them, you are sending a message that this is a safe place and you are someone they can trust. You'll be surprised at the "street cred" this gives you.
2. Promote the Transgender Day of Visibility (March 31) or the Trans Awareness Week (November 12–19). GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) and gender spectrum (gender.spectrum.org) have promotional materials and activity ideas. There are many other organizations that you can support as well. Choose which are right for your school or community.
3. Have and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for any type of harassment, including the use of the words *tranny*, *faggot* or *gay* in a derogatory way. Simply calling a young person out when they use those terms inappropriately is often all that is necessary to set a supportive tone.
4. It is vital that schools, libraries, and communities bolster their support for mental health concerns. There is a proven higher rate of suicide among gay, lesbian, and transgender young people. Communities can offer mental health awareness events such as walks and information days that are open to the public. Hand out green ribbons for Mental Health Awareness Month (May) around town.
5. Host a screening of "It Gets Better" videos at your public library or community center (itgetsbetter.org/video). Make it a fun day with snacks and activities for all who attend.
6. Stay aware of local and national issues. Write government officials about bills that impact the transgender community, attend government meetings, and let your voice be heard in support of inclusion for all.
7. Share information about accepting websites like Trevo Space, a Trevor Program, (trevorspace.org) and Gender Spectrum Lounge, a Gender Spectrum Program, (genderspectrum.org/lounge).

