

PRIDE

in our pages

**Picture
Books**

**Middle Grade
Novels**

**Young Adult
Novels**

Book Recommendations & Conversation Starters for Grades K-12

At Random House Children's Books, we have pride in our pages. Use these books to start conversations about LGBTQIA+ history and experiences, gender stereotypes, human rights, and the importance of celebrating yourself as you are and others as they are.

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

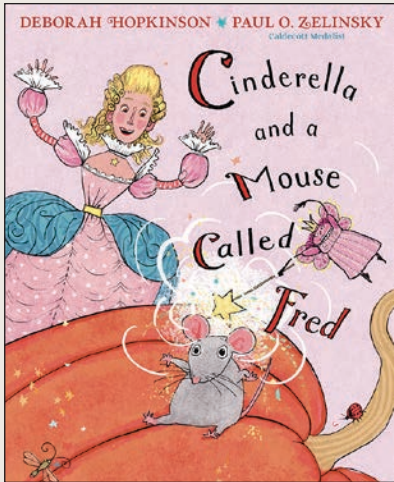
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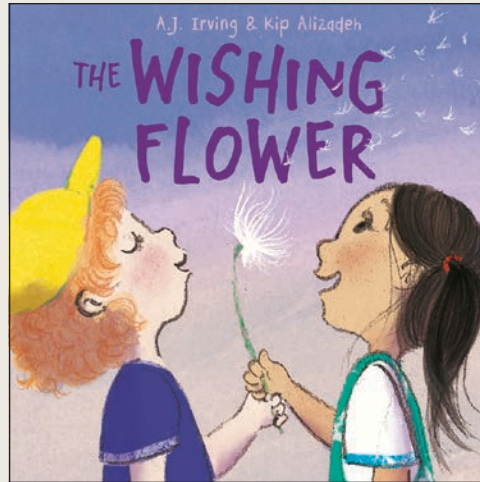
Introduction

Back in 1969 when the first YA novel with a gay protagonist came out, very few people thought it would succeed, let alone lead to decades of increasing LGBTQIA+ representation. In the fifty years since the publication of *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* by John Donovan, authors have found greater freedom to explore the stories of youth whose identities extend beyond the historically typical protagonists who were gay, cisgender, white, and male. In addition, while early YA tended to treat queer and trans youth as other, many contemporary authors are creating worlds and stories in which queer and trans young people are not always struggling to fit in. David Levithan, in *Boy Meets Boy*, wrote one of the earliest examples of a nearly universally accepted gay protagonist, and it was so unexpected and seemingly unreal to people that in a few cases, it was classified as magical realism. Now, despite a new push to dehumanize LGBTQIA+ people and ban the books that center them, literature that celebrates the stories of amazing, strong, powerful, loud, hormonal, messy, and unrepentantly queer/trans teens is more prolific than ever. No teen should have to grow up feeling alone in who they are, and these narratives ensure that everyone can feel seen, understood, valued, and celebrated.

Discussion Questions



★ “A charming Ella for a new generation.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



★ “A strong purchase for all collections.”
—*School Library Journal*, starred review
★ *Kirkus Reviews*



★ “This is a special book.”
—*Booklist*, starred review

Picture Books

- In the original fairy tale, Cinderella ends up with the handsome Prince, but in *Cinderella and a Mouse Called Fred*, she ends up with a farmer instead. How does this change the meaning of the story? What makes Cinderella avoid the prince when he is searching for the owner of the magic slipper? Why do you think the author chose for Cinderella to fall in love with another girl?
- Have you or someone you know ever felt different or alone like Birdie in *The Wishing Flower*? Why do you think Birdie wants to be brave after meeting Sunny? What kinds of things do they have in common? What do you think Birdie and Sunny mean at the end of the story when they both say that their wishes already came true?
- *Door by Door* tells a very important story about identity and acceptance, and it shows what somebody can achieve with the support of others. Early in the story, Sarah talks about wanting to change the world. How does she change things in her own life, and how does she begin to change the world around her? Why is it so important for her to find other people who support her?
- Use your imagination to swap the main characters with each other across stories (i.e., imagine Cinderella in *Door by Door*), and think about how they might react to the situations they encounter? Would they react or behave differently than the original main character?



“A heartwarming story.”
—*School Library Journal*



★ “Belongs on every shelf.”
—*School Library Journal*,
starred review
★ *Publishers Weekly*
★ *Booklist*



“A fresh and exhilarating
coming-of-age story.”
—*Shelf Awareness*

Middle Grade

- There’s a lot happening *The Sister Split*: a wedding, moving to a new house, a new stepsister, losing friends, discovering a crush, figuring out new emotions and attractions. Why do you think Autumn is so upset about her mom getting married to Harrison? Why is Autumn so surprised when she sees that her tennis instructor has a girlfriend? How does this change how she sees Saskia?
- Some people are convinced that gender is a binary, but history has taught us that gender is a spectrum, and some people don’t fit in the categories of male or female, like the protagonist of *Sir Callie*. How do others react to Callie throughout the book, and why do you think gender matters so much to some of them? How do Callie and their friends confront other kinds of discrimination throughout the story? How does Callie work to confront their internalized shame?
- It’s not surprising that Alex Wise is feeling a bit overwhelmed by the whole end-of-the-world thing, but there’s also friendship drama, homophobia, and family issues. Why did Alex and Sky’s friendship fall apart? What role did homophobia play in their falling out? How is Alex’s sexuality treated throughout the book? Why do you think it matters so much to some and not at all to others? What other aspects of Alex’s identity impact how others interact with him?

Middle Grade Extension Activity

- All three of these novels use common tropes but also confront them and help readers to see how they can be made more inclusive, whether in terms of gender and sexuality or other aspects of identity. Consider how each book complicates a particular common narrative and how the authors made their novels more inclusive for a wider variety of readers.



“Urgent and vulnerable.”
—*Booklist*



“Sweet-filled fun.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*



★ “Essential reading for lovers of historical fiction.”
—*School Library Journal*,
starred review
★ *Shelf Awareness*
★ *The Bulletin*

Young Adult

- *The Rules of Us*, at its core, is a story about friendship and self-discovery, but these themes are complicated by codependency. How does Jillian’s reliance on Henry affect their friendship as the novel progresses? How does their mutual codependency start to complicate their individual journeys of sexual awakening and self-discovery? What eventually allows them to separate but remain friends?
- What do you think it is that makes the fake dating trope so popular in fiction? What does Sher Lee do to change this trope in *Fake Dates and Mooncakes*? How do culture, ethnicity, class, wealth, and success complicate Dylan and Theo’s romantic entanglements? How does food play a role in their relationship?
- In *This Rebel Heart*, Katherine Locke explores painful and important moments in history with a magical, fantastical flair. Why do you think the author chose to include magic in Csilla’s story? How does the inclusion of queer characters and relationships throughout the novel challenge how history is often taught or talked about? How did Csilla’s culture and religion change how she experienced the war compared to other people within the narrative? Why is this important to remember even now?





- ★ “Both vulnerable and fierce.”
—*Publishers Weekly*,
starred review
- ★ *School Library Journal*



- What surprised you—or what did you appreciate—about how the author of *Dear Medusa* approaches topics such as sexual assault, shame, misogyny, and queer sexuality? How does the narrative push back against the idea that anger is a negative emotion? What is the connection between Alicia’s story and the myth of Medusa? The novel has been described by many people as feminist. What does feminism mean to you, and do you think the story is feminist? How?
- *Wide Awake Now* highlights the fragility of political and social institutions and the resilience of the human spirit through a mix of fact and fiction. Which elements of the novel are reflections of the real world, and which are fictionalized? How does the author confront harmful political trends and attacks on human rights throughout the novel?

Young Adult Extension Activities

- What similar themes do you see across these novels? How do the different authors explore these similar themes differently? How do these different approaches impact your enjoyment and comprehension of each of the themes that you’ve uncovered?
- How are gender and sexuality explored in different ways by each author? How do gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity impact the various protagonists in different ways? In what ways are their experiences similar?
- How do the authors ensure that their stories are inclusive and diverse? Why does this matter? How do these books differ from other books that you’ve read, in terms of representation?

Online Resources

- **Advocates for Youth** (advocatesforyouth.org)
Advocates for Youth works with young people and adult allies to create a world where LGBTQ+ folks have greater bodily autonomy, more knowledge related to gender and sexual health, and resources to help fight for justice and political change.
- **The Asexual Visibility and Education Network** (asexuality.org)
AVEN hosts an online space for asexual people to find community, as well as to provide education and resources for those who do not understand what it means to be asexual.
- **BTAC—Black Trans Advocacy Coalition** (blacktrans.org)
BTAC is a social justice focused organization that seeks to address inequities faced by Black transgender people through advocacy and community building.
- **Gender Spectrum** (genderspectrum.org)
Gender Spectrum works to create inclusive and nurturing spaces for children and teens by offering online consulting, resources and toolkits, and online groups for youth and adults to build community, ask questions, and offer support.
- **GLSEN—the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network** (glsen.org)
GLSEN provides students, teachers, and parents with resources to help make schools safer and more inclusive. There is also a step-by-step guide on how to start a GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance).
- **Human Rights Campaign** (hrc.org/resources)
The Human Rights Campaign advocates for equality for all, with a focus on LGBTQ+ individuals. They provide information and links to resources, research, and statistics to help people in the continued fight for human rights.
- **LGBTQ Reads** (lgbtqreads.com)
Dahlia Adler created LGBTQ Reads as a space to talk about books that focus on queer and trans representation. There are lists of books for different age ranges across a spectrum of genres.
- **PFLAG—Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays** (pflag.org)
PFLAG provides resources and supports for parents and families who want to create safe and welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ people at home and in society at large.
- **Q Chat Space** (qchatspace.org)
Facilitated live discussion groups provide a space for LGBTQ+ and questioning teens to find new friends, ask questions, and build community.
- **Transgender Teen Survival Guide** (transgenderteensurvivalguide.com)
This blog offers a helpful and thorough FAQ along with links to resources to help youth find answers to questions about transitioning, coming out, and finding safe spaces to connect with other trans and nonconforming individuals.
- **The Trevor Project** (thetrevorproject.org)
The Trevor Project offers crisis support, links to current research and educational materials, and guides for successful advocacy.

Prepared by Dr. Robert Bittner, LGBTQ+ YA literature specialist



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